

MOTIVE FOR MURDER

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BY

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Price Rs. 4-12

BOMBAY
THACKER & CO., LTD.

1944

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*Set and printed in India by
R. Bourdon at Western Printers & Publishers Press
15-23, Hamam Street, Fort, Bombay.
and Published by C. Murphy, Manager,
Thacker & Co., Ltd. Rampart Row, Bombay.*

CHAPTER I

TWO men, one English and the other American, were walking down that broad and glittering thoroughfare, the Avenida Rio Branco. They were discussing their plans for the evening. Both were a little drunk. They had dined well and were in cheerful spirits.

The time was September, 1939, and war clouds hung over Europe. But in Rio, European problems seemed comfortably remote.....as remote just then as the prospect of years of war which lay ahead.

"What have you fixed for to-night, Bill?" asked the American.

Bill Ridgway considered himself an authority on the city's night life. He had lived for years in Rio, where he worked as a shipping agent. The other man, Clyde Moncrieff, was a journalist supposedly on holiday in Brazil—supposedly, because the true American journalist never does go on holiday. One part of his brain is always alert for lively copy or possible scoops for his paper. It was this quality in his companion which Bill deplored. He considered that it hampered their pursuit of adventure—there being so much about the night life of Rio that is unprintable.

"We might begin with a flutter at *Campista*." Bill now replied, "I know a joint in the Rua Cattete...And after that....."

"But what about that dope den you promised to show me," interposed Clyde firmly.

"Oh, Lord, what a persistent devil you are. I tell you it isn't amusing—not after the first time."

"Well, it will be the first time for me."

"Some fairly shady characters go there. Might be dangerous."

"Sure, I know that, Bill. I get a kick out of danger."

"Have it your own way. But if that old villain, Coutinhos, who runs the show guessed you were a newspaper man out for copy he'd have your throat slit as easy as thinking about it."

Clyde laughed. "Cut it out, Bill. I'm not looking for copy to-night."

"All right.....I believe you. But you've got the longest nose for news of any chap I've ever met. Try to forget your job—for the next hour or two, anyhow."

They quickened their pace, putting the brightly lit main thoroughfare behind them. Near the Praca Maua they paused to buy American newspapers. The headlines in banner type, were all of the war.

"Everything else is crowded out," said Clyde, considering the make-up with a professional eye.

"You Americans'll be in it before the end—same as last time...starting all over again. My God. Come to think of it, it's just as well if we do have a shot of dope to-night.....take us away from realities for a time."

He conducted his friend through several narrow streets behind the town. They were badly lit and paved, and the warm tropical air reeked with the smell of rotting fruit in the gutters.

"Not a very savoury neighbourhood," commented Bill as they paused before a shabby house in a narrow dark alley. He gave four sharp raps on the door. After a slight pause the door was half opened and a man peered out at them. He looked incredibly old, so wizened and lined was his face, and his eyes, like black beads were surmounted by monstrously shaggy brows. His

expression was one of mistrust and suspicion until Bill addressed him in low rapid tones.

As they spoke in Portuguese Clyde could not catch even the drift of their remarks, but after a few moments the door was opened wider to allow them to enter the narrow passage, bare and uncarpeted and lighted by an oil lamp fixed in a bracket. The man who had opened the door preceded them up a staircase. At the top of the stairs he halted and pushed open a door.

They found themselves in a tiny antechamber which had evidently been partitioned off from a larger apartment. It was dimly lit and the air was heavy.

A man came forward—Clyde could barely see his outline in the shadowy apartment—there was a whispered conversation, and then opening a door in the partition, he motioned him to follow them.

They were now in a long, low room devoid of furniture with the exception of one or two divans placed against the wall and mattresses on which were high leather-covered cushions. The air was almost stifling and the silence oppressive. Clyde looked about him full of eagerness and curiosity. As his eyes became accustomed to the dim light he observed here and there recumbent forms stretched on the mattress, and the squatting figure of a man in the centre of the room, roasting opium.

"Having arrived I suppose you're going to smoke a pipe?" Bill remarked. Clyde nodded eagerly, slightly thrilled and excited at the prospect of a new experience. Bill moved away and left him standing in the middle of the room, feeling awkward as he towered over the recumbent forms.

Nobody appeared to take the slightest notice of him, however, and at last he approached the man who was roasting opium and, stretching himself on a mattress, made a sign to him. The man nodded and brought the apparatus beside Clyde who watched his operations,

fascinated. He took a slender dipper, putting the sharp end in the opium, a thick treacly-looking mixture, with drew it swiftly and then twisted it round and round with much dexterity over the flame of the tiny lamp. Sometimes he took it from the flame and rolled the opium. Finally he heated the bowl of the pipe and thrust in the opium which now thoroughly roasted, was clinging to the dipper like a fragment of charred wood. He handed the pipe to Clyde who put the stem to his lips, but with a rapid gesture, the man held out the lamp. Then, seeing that he had a novice to deal with, he showed him by signs the correct way to smoke. Clyde speedily became initiated..... Gradually, a delightfully soothing languor crept over him, a lassitude that was delicious. The dingy room seemed unreal, as though he were hovering on the borderland of another world. His drifting attention was, however, captured by the face of a man reclining on a low couch next to his. The dull glow of the lamp fell on his features which Clyde knew to be English. It was a pale sensitive face stamped with dissipation, but still showing traces of breeding and good looks. Clyde wondered if he was a regular habitue, decided that he would no doubt make a "good story" if facts were got out of him; then he drifted into a hazy sleep.

Opium gives dreams of exquisite beauty; but it can also induce horrible and terrifying visions. Clyde dreamt of murder. It seemed to him that a man emerged like a snake from the shadowy recesses of the room and, bending over the pale-faced youth on the adjoining couch, raised a knife and stabbed him between the shoulder blades. With a stifled cry Clyde sat up sharply.

Then he knew that his senses had not been actually invaded by sleep when he was under the influence of the drug. The horror had not after all, been a dream. A murder had taken place. The man at his side lay dead, his eyes wide open, his mouth twisted and drawn, while on the grey blanket of his couch was a dark patch... a patch that was slowly spreading.....

And now Clyde was aware of a low angry murmur of voices. Three men at the end of the room were talking excitedly. They turned and came towards him. The next moment a hand fell heavily on his shoulder.

"We must get out of this as quickly as we can." It was Bill Ridgway speaking. "Don't lose a second." Jerking his friend by the arm, he half pushed half dragged him to a small door in the wall on the opposite side from which they had entered. It opened on to a narrow flight of steps and a small unlit passage at the end of which was another door which led into an alley.

"Now we'll have to sprint for it," panted Bill. "They'll soon be on us....lucky I knew about that other door."

"Say, what's all this about," began Clyde.

"They think you knifed that bloke next to you... but don't stop to ask questions. They're after us already."

Clyde glanced back over his shoulder. Three men—one a big brawny muscular looking brute—were bearing down on them silently and with disconcerting swiftness. Clyde asked no more questions. Without a revolver he knew that only his legs could carry him out of the present difficulty. He turned, lowered his head and ran like a hare.

He followed Bill through a labyrinth of alleys, never pausing until they were certain they had shaken off their pursuers.

At last Bill paused before a small house and knocked urgently on the door. It was opened by a Portuguese woman, fat and slatternly. Bill spoke to her, whereupon she nodded and signed to them to enter. They followed her down a passage their footsteps echoing on the uncarpeted wooden floor. She led them into a room, bare and cheerless, furnished only with a small hard iron bedstead, a wash-stand and a wooden chair. Like the passage, the floor was uncarpeted.

"You'll have to stop here for to-night, Clyde," remarked Bill when the woman had gone out. "You'll be safe, so don't worry. To-morrow....."

"Worry—hell," broke in Clyde indignantly. "Why should I skulk here as if I were a crook? We'll go to the police right now...ask for an investigation. . ." He paused as his friend gave a cynical laugh.

"That shows how little you know of the Brazilian police, old chap. Those of them who are incorruptible can be exceedingly stupid. You might, of course, be lucky and get away with nothing more irksome than the excessive greasing of many palms; or you might be in the dashed uncomfortable position of finding yourself arrested for murder."

"But why should they pick on me for the murder of that gun...they wouldn't be able to find the least motive. I could clear myself in ten minutes."

"As I said, you don't know the Brazilian police. And you may well ask why they should pick on you. I think I can tell you. When we went into that dive, I decided I wouldn't smoke. Opium doesn't agree with me. So I was able to see what happened. True, I wasn't able to distinguish very well the face of the chap who did that other bloke in, but I did hear him tell Coutinhos that you were the murderer. Said he saw you do it. but I didn't wait for explanations. I just dragged you away in time."

"Then because I happened to be nearest to the murdered man. I was marked down for the crime?"

"Exactly. Your tough luck, you see."

"To-morrow morning I go right to the American consul..."

"I shouldn't advise you to do that. You must lie low—and leave the rest to me. As I feel responsible for getting you in this mess, it's up to me to help you out of it." Bill sat down on the bed and stared at

the floor, his brows drawn together in concentrated thought.

"I have it," he said at last. "Thank your lucky stars that I'm a shipping agent."

Clyde failed to look grateful. "What's the big idea?"

"I know a way to get you out of Brazil without any fuss or enquiry. It's rather ingenious...luckily you're a resourceful sort of chap, and I believe you'll pull it off."

Clyde lifted his head. "Go ahead...spill it."

"On Thursday the luxury liner, "Montania" is due to sail to England. You're sailing with her."

"Not on your life....I'm going back to New York."

"Don't be deliberately stubborn, Clyde. You don't seem aware of your danger. I know the Brazilian police. I know how easily this affair might be muddled, and how tragic the results could be for you. Forget inconvenience and this sudden changing of your plans. You must get out of the country as soon as possible."

His manner was so emphatic that Clyde was impressed. He decided to make no further protest.

"What plan have you?" he enquired briefly.

"I'm going to book a passage for you on the "Montania"....under another name, of course....Then I shall cancel it on the day of departure."

"Cancel it...I don't get the idea..."

"Just going on board under an assumed name isn't going to help you any, old son. It won't be so easy for you as that. You'll lie low here until sailing day. Half an hour before the "Montania" is due to sail, you'll walk up the gangway and mingle with the crowd. You know what it's like at that time—the public rooms, decks and alleyways crowded with visitors and friends of the passengers, all bustle and confusion. You won't be noticed. When the order, "All

visitors ashore" comes, you'll stay on board....slip down to the cabin that has been booked—and cancelled. It isn't likely that there'll be an eleventh hour passenger to book the cabin—though of course there's always that risk. However, the ship isn't full—so many cancellations owing to the war—so there's nothing to worry about on that score."

"In spite of that I don't quite get the idea."

"You'll be the newest sort of stowaway, Clyde. And it shouldn't be too uncomfortable. The cabin has got its own bathroom...a wardrobe where you may have to conceal yourself frequently during the day...a comfortable bed on which to sleep at night—now, don't interrupt. You'll have a suitcase packed with sufficient food to last you the voyage, biscuits, tinned beef, meat extract, and so on. Water will be available, of course, in the cabin. All you've got to do is to keep out of sight."

"But I'm sure to be discovered...when the stewards come in to clean the place..."

Bill laughed. "Stewards have too much to do on a voyage to waste time in dusting an empty cabin. It's possible the Captain may look in during the usual morning inspection...but that's a remote chance. You'll have to be on the alert all the time, during the day. The worst part is arriving...I'm going to cable a pal of mine...a coastguard...He's got a motor boat, you'll have to slip overboard the night before the "Montania" arrives at Tilbury, and he'll pick you up. I know I can rely on him, but that's where the biggest risk lies. I'll write down for you what instructions I can...but there's likely to be a hitch there. The other alternative is to try to bluff it out at the other end, where there's bound to be trouble. They might send you back here...especially if they've had any wireless messages about a man being wanted for murder." Bill paced up and down the small room in obvious agitation.

Clyde got up and put his hand on his friend's shoulder. "Don't worry, Bill. I shall get away with it. You're taking risks, too."

"Never mind about me. The whole trouble is that blighter saying he *saw* you do the murder. He disappeared, but the lack of a witness wouldn't bother Coutinhos....he'd be certain to swear that he also saw you knife that chap."

There was a tense silence. Then Bill said wryly, "You told me to-night, Clyde, that you got a kick out of danger. There's danger ahead, all right. You wanted a kick, and by God, you've got it!"

CHAPTER II

MRS. BRACKENBURY was in a very bad temper. This was not solely on account of the flurry of embarking which—seasoned traveller though she was—always annoyed her. Her plans had been upset by what she termed “this foolish and unnecessary war” in Europe. She had intended to winter in Rio. For years she had wintered abroad, and now, forces stronger than herself compelled her to return to England just when the climate would be at its worst. It was most exasperating. She looked round her state-room on the “Montania” with indifference to the luxury of its appointments and her gaze fell on the luggage which had just been brought in.

“Miss Wyndham,” she called sharply.

Sally Wyndham appeared in the doorway. She was Mrs. Brackenbury’s companion secretary. This comprised many roles including that of personal maid, when occasion demanded it, mediator in shops where Mrs. Brackenbury had frequent disputes, and general confidante. She spoke three languages, was good tempered and had a sense of humour—assets very necessary to her in her present position. At the moment she needed no special intuition to observe that her employer was in one of her difficult moods.

“The luggage is not all here,” said Mrs. Brackenbury sharply. “I hope you’ve checked it since you came on board.....remember that suit case I lost at Pernambuco.”

Sally repressed a sigh. Would she ever be allowed to forget the suit case, for which she was held responsible

although it had been dropped by a porter into the sea. "The remainder of the luggage will be brought down later," she said. "But I won't start unpacking until after the boat-drill."

The buzzing of the drill signal sounded at this moment, while a steward running along the alleyway was calling out, "All collect on B Deck for boat drill."

"That tiresome boat drill," grumbled Mrs. Brackenbury. "You can go in my place, as usual."

"I'm afraid you'll have to go yourself as well, this time," Sally replied firmly. "They're very strict about it in wartime...shall I help you on with your life jacket?"

When they arrived all the passengers had gathered aft on B Deck and the Chief Officer was addressing them. He spoke quietly and impressively.

"I want you all to understand what to do in the event of a warning. Directly you hear the alarm bell ringing as it did just now, put on your life jackets and go immediately to your own life boat station. Go in a quiet orderly fashion and above everything don't panic. Remember that your behaviour will affect those who are in your vicinity. But please don't get unnecessarily alarmed. Of course, in times of war anything may happen on the seas. . . .As a special precaution there will be boat drill every day during the voyage and you will be expected to attend. . ."

"I, for one, shall certainly not do that," Mrs. Brackenbury remarked to Sally as they moved away. There was a thoughtful expression on her face. "It's not pleasant travelling on the sea in these days....let me see, where is your cabin, Miss Wyndham? On D deck, isn't it...you're rather far away if...if....anything should happen."

"Far away from, what, Mrs. Brackenbury? I know the number of my lifeboat——"

"I meant far away from me. It would be much better if you were at hand in case we were torpedoed. I should require you...you know how highly strung I am."

Mrs. Brackenbury believed this, although she was about as highly strung as a plough horse. She now paused for a moment. "We'll go to the purser's office and see if he can change your cabin...give you one near me."

"The cabins on A Deck are twice as expensive." Sally had not illusions about her employer's generosity.

"The purser may—adjust that matter. This is a special case. I am sure he will meet me."

The purser did "meet" her. Mrs. Brackenbury was a valued passenger—one who travelled much and always engaged the most expensive suites. The "Montania" had sailed from Rio with a fairly small passenger list, and so, as a gracious gesture the purser at once agreed to change the cabin on D deck for one of the unoccupied luxury staterooms, without further charge.

The prospect of getting something for nothing, restored Mrs. Brackenbury's good humour. She beamed on both the purser and her companion.

"Now you had better run and get your things transferred to the other cabin, Miss Wyndham, at once," he said affably. "No. 34...A Deck..."

Sally lost no time in making the transference. It was, she considered, a stroke of luck and she felt grateful to the obliging purser. The steward who carried her luggage from D Deck, remarked cheerily.

"You've had a change for the better, Miss."

She nodded, laughing gaily. "Yes. Isn't this a lovely cabin—a bathroom and a wardrobe." She was not used to such luxuries when travelling with her employer. "Inside" cabins—those with limited space,

hooks in the place of a wardrobe, and absolutely no port-hole—usually fell to her lot. "I'm in luck," she added.

"Well, I hope your luck holds for the whole trip, Miss," remarked the steward.

"Do you think we shall be...all right?"

"Here's hoping. But I shan't be sorry when we're safely docked in old England...if Fritz doesn't stop us, that is."

"I don't think I feel nervous" Sally decided. "Thank you for bringing in the luggage." She handed the man a tip.

"Thank you, Miss. Is that all? A cabin trunk and two suit-cases?"

She considered her modest luggage and nodded. "Absolutely everything."

After the steward had gone out she decided to unpack at once. Kneeling beside her cabin trunk, she reflected happily that she had begun the voyage well. Luck was with her.

As she rose from her knees with frocks over her arm to put in that spacious wardrobe complete—oh joy—with hangers, a slight sound made her turn sharply. She found that she was looking into barrel of a .450 Webley service revolver. The man behind it was standing at the door of the bathroom. His face was set, and there was no mistaking the menace in his tones as he said in a low voice:

her with the revolver. He was tall, good-looking, with—it scarcely seemed credible—almost a pleasant face. But for that stern cold glint in his eyes she could have imagined he was masquerading as a desperate character.

"Where have you come from?" she demanded, wondering if that loud persistent thumping could be her own heart beats.

"I was concealed in the bathroom."

"You were here when the steward came in with me just now?"

He nodded. "I've been here since just before we sailed from Rio."

"What do you want?" As she spoke, she edged, almost imperceptibly towards the door.

He observed the movement however, and his lips tightened. "Lock that door," he commanded. "And remember, I'm keeping you covered, so don't try to dash out and call for help."

Sally hesitated, but only for a moment. Then she locked the door.

"Now sit down."

A flash of her usual spirit came into Sally's eyes. "I shall not sit down. I insist upon knowing what you are doing here...concealed in my cabin."

"It ought not to be your cabin...you've no right to change quarters like that, after sailing. That's one thing I hadn't reckoned on. That's why I had to threaten you." Half to himself, he added, "I must say I admire your courage."

"I don't admire your impudence." She lifted her chin.

"Impudence!" he echoed. "It's a stroke of sheer daring. My position is desperate..."

"I think that better describes my position at the moment."

"Forgive me. I want to explain. Will you listen to me?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "A person who is at the point of a revolver must listen, I suppose. But if you take me for a wealthy passenger with jewels and money to hand over, I'm afraid you're in for a big disappointment."

"Money...jewels." For the first time the grim tense expression left his face. You've got the wrong idea. Look, I'll put the revolver in my pocket. Now, won't you sit down so that we can talk?"

Sally dropped rather suddenly into the chair he pulled forward. She did not want him to know how shaky she felt at the knees. He drew up another chair facing her.

"Fact is, I'm a stowaway. It's very essential that I should travel from Rio to England without my name being on the passenger list."

Sally lifted her head sharply. A new idea had presented itself. "I understand ..You are a.....a.....spy."

He laughed outright. "Nothing so...romantic or important. I'm just an American citizen...a journalist...no, don't get me wrong. I'm not doing this sort of thing as a newspaper stunt. My name is Clyde Moncrieff...I've been staying in Rio on holiday. There, through no fault of my own, I ran into a spot of trouble..." Simply, unreservedly, he related the happenings of the night in the opium den, and his friend's plan to get him out of the country.

"He thought of everything—prepared me for every emergency—except this—a passenger changing a cabin during the voyage. But even in that, luck is on my side. I might have had a foolish hysterical woman for my travelling companion—instead of a calm, level-headed one like you."

She snatched at a phrase. "Travelling companion?"

"I'm afraid we must share this cabin for the voyage." His voice was quiet but ominously firm.

Sally forgot her alarm in anger. "You're talking like a fool. I warn you now that I shall inform the captain—I won't be a party to this. It's outrageous that you should expect me to shelter you."

Clyde saw that the girl was determined.

"Don't you believe my story?" he asked simply.

For a moment she hesitated. "Yes, I do believe it, though it all sounded so melodramatic. I could see you weren't inventing it. Believe me, I am deeply sorry for you. But you might not get other people to believe you so easily when you are discovered."

"I'm not going to be discovered. I don't think you would give me away." Never in all his adventurous life had Clyde been in such a desperate position. It might be that his whole future depended on this girl with the steady eyes and firm chin. He had already observed however that her hazel eyes had a glint of humour and this gave him hope. Although, in his panic, he had begun by threatening her with the revolver, instinctively he knew this was not the right line to take. He began to plead, desperately urgently. She shook her head.

"You don't seem to realise what an appalling position mine would be if I helped you. I can't see for the moment how we could carry it off. I should lose my job... My name would come into that unpleasant affair in which you were mixed up in Rio... I... I... can't do this. It's sheer madness to suggest it...."

She stopped speaking abruptly. There was a sharp knock on the door. A new sort of panic descended upon Sally. Supposing it was her employer. Mrs. Brackenbury was not likely to accept her explanation of how she came to be locked in the cabin with a strange man.

He stepped up to her and caught her by the arm. "For God's sake don't give me away. I rely on you." His whispered tones were tense with anxiety. She did not reply.

The knocking was repeated. . . . sharper this time. Clyde pleaded no further. Seeking cover, he rushed to the bathroom.

Sally had turned very pale. She struggled to steady the trembling of her hands, to appear outwardly calm. Then she went up to the cabin door and flung it open.

CHAPTER III

CLYDE felt that his last chance had gone. The girl intended to give him up. Indeed, what right had he to ask her to protect him. And if he were taken before the Captain, how could he clear himself? He would be sent back to Rio to face a charge of murder. His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of voices in the cabin.

Sally, when she opened the door, was extremely relieved to see, not the imposing form of her employer standing on the threshold, but the stewardess who had come for orders for breakfast, a meal which Sally usually took in her cabin.

"You will take orange juice before breakfast, Madam?"

Sally nodded. "Yes, please."

The stewardess took a menu card from beneath the bib of her apron. "And for breakfast. . . .?"

"I think I'll have. . .let me see..." her eye drifted down the long elaborate menu. No scheme of war rations had yet come into force on the "Montania." "Porridge and cream, please, ham and eggs, hot rolls marmalade and coffee."

The stewardess jotted down the items. "And what time shall I prepare your bath?"

"I can see to that myself as I have my own bathroom. . .thanks, all the same."

"No other orders, Madam?"

"None, thanks."

The stewardess paused for some moments to chat about the forthcoming voyage, and, inevitably the war. After she had gone out, Sally locked the door.

"You can come out now," she said, slightly raising her voice.

Clyde stumbled out of the bathroom, his relief mingled with apprehension. What would be the girl's next move? Had she, while talking to the stewardess, given her some secret sign that she needed help? She might even have scribbled a message on the menu card she had been studying so carefully. Unable to bear the suspense, he blurted out.

"You intend to give me up?"

Sally shrugged her shoulders. "Do you really think that I'm going to eat a breakfast like that all by myself?"

He seemed overcome. She scarcely listened to the words of thanks which he stammered out. What had induced her to take on the appalling risk of sheltering him? Was it because of those words of his, "I rely upon you." People did not usually rely upon her in vain. Or had the desperate hunted look in his eyes called forth her protective instinct? She felt angry with herself that she became involved in this affair; she was deeply worried and apprehensive. Yet she knew that she could not hand the man over to the Captain and abandon him in his present desperate position.

"Tell me your plans—and the part I must play," she said quietly.

"Your part is to keep guard and be on the look-out. When you are not here I shall conceal myself in the wardrobe or bathroom. If there's a vacant cabin on the other side of the alleyway, I could sleep there, but I dare not try that until we have been some days at sea. If you would tell your stewardess that you require an extra blanket and pillow—then I could fix up some sort of shakedown in the bath."

She smiled for the first time since their encounter. It lit up her face and set her eyes twinkling. "You seem to have thought of everything."

"Not everything. I hadn't anticipated this unoccupied cabin being taken after we sailed."

"It was Brackenbury's idea....."

"Mrs. Brackenbury?"

"She's my employer. She thought it would be safer—for her—if I changed to a cabin next door. This is such a lovely cabin, too, compared with the one that had been booked for me on D. Deck...A bathroom, a wardrobe....I thought it such a stroke of luck to get here."

"You don't think that now?"

"I don't indeed," she said gravely. "But it might be luck for you. You see, you really do need help to carry out this stowaway idea with any success. Now I must go to Mrs. Brackenbury. She's always difficult on sailing days, and she will be annoyed if I stay away much longer. You must conceal yourself in the wardrobe until I come back."

"Shall you be long?"

"Some hours, I'm afraid. We never go down to the dining saloon the first evening, but dine in Mrs. Brackenbury's stateroom. She expects me to be with her all the time until she retires."

Clyde felt that he instinctively disliked Mrs. Brackenbury. Later on he was to discover that his instinct had not failed him. Before Sally turned to go out of the room he said, "Can you find out if there is a cabin on the other side of the alleyway unoccupied? If so, I shall take possession, and relieve you of my embarrassing presence."

"I'll try to find out for you. I should have to ask the purser. But if you try to run this scheme singlehanded you are taking a greater risk."

She looked thoughtful as she went out, aware that she was glancing up and down the alleyway with marked furtiveness as she closed the cabin door behind her.

Mrs. Brackenbury found her companion abstracted that evening and had occasion to speak to her sharply about it.

"I do hope you're not going to get jumpy on this voyage and worry about torpedoes all the time," she said. "You're not yourself, I can see. Something's wrong with you."

Sally coloured. She protested vehemently that she was not likely to be nervous during the trip.

("At all events not on account of torpedoes," she thought.) It seemed to her that the evening would never come to an end. But at last everything necessary for the voyage had been unpacked, they had dined and played bezique, and Mrs. Brackenbury announced her intention of going to bed. Sally hurried away to the smoking room where sandwiches were being put out for those passengers who wanted bed-time snacks. Piling some sandwiches on a plate, she took them to her cabin. The stowaway must be feeling hungry.

But Clyde, though grateful for this kindly thought, was not inclined for food. For two nights he had scarcely slept and now that the immediate danger that threatened him was removed, he was aware of a vast overwhelming fatigue. Sally noted this and said. "You must get some rest. I'll have my bath now then you can turn in for the night."

"You're very kind," he said. "Fate has played you a cruel trick to thrust me on you like this. But is there a chance of my getting an empty cabin elsewhere?"

"There isn't an empty one, it seems on this alleyway. And of course, it wouldn't be safe for you to go to any other part of the ship now. You would certainly be seen by the stewards on night duty. You'll have to stay here now. But try not to worry too much about it."

"I'm afraid it is worrying you very much. If Mrs. Brackenbury were to find out——"

"She pulled me up sharply once or twice this evening for being abstracted. I played an appalling game at bezique. I found myself thinking of you shut up all those hours in the wardrobe, and wondering if I might not come back to find you had suffocated."

"So that was it. I thought you opened the wardrobe door warily when you came in—were you expecting my inert body to fall forward?"

They laughed. The tension had snapped. For a few moments both forgot the threatened danger of discovery.

"You can sit down and read while I have my bath... relax," she said, handing him a book.

He sat down obediently, thankful enough to relax after the hours of concealment in the wardrobe. When Sally came out of the bathroom, half an hour later, she saw that he had fallen asleep. She stood for a moment looking down at him. His face was pale, his hair tumbled, and it gave him a boyish air that struck her as being somehow pathetic. Could this be the same stern man with the grim mouth that had threatened her with a revolver only a few hours ago?

Suddenly he opened his eyes and, involuntarily, sprang to his feet in alarm.

"I let myself go to sleep! I was completely off my guard. You must think me a careless fool..."

"I think you're almost in a state of collapse from fatigue. There's no need for you to worry until to-morrow morning. I got the extra pillow for you from the stewardess, and the blanket....and you can take my travelling rug, too...Your shakedown in the bath will be hard, I'm afraid, but at least you won't feel cold."

"Hard ! It's sheer luxury. Why, I could sleep soundly on a plank tonight."

Sally wished she could have slept so profoundly. All that night she lay wide-eyed and sleepless in her berth. Now that she faced the situation squarely, she saw how slender were his chances of making the voyage without being discovered.

"I was crazy to say I'd shelter him," she thought. If Mrs. Brackenbury got to know of it, what horrid implications she would voice. "If she knew now," ran on Sally's thoughts "I can guess what she'd say... after all it's a difficult thing to explain away.....To think there's a man sleeping in my bathroom and I don't even know his name !"

CHAPTER IV

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR Matthew Purcell, of the Criminal Investigation Department of New Scotland Yard was leaning against the deck-rail as the "Montania" left Guanabara Bay registering thanks that he was leaving Brazil. The fantastic beauty of Rio Harbour with its hundred isles, its entrance guarded by the two gigantic rocks, "Pao de Assucar" and "Sao Joao" rising sheer out of the sea—left him unmoved. He had no glamorous recollections of Rio, having been sent there on an unsavoury case dealing with white traffic activities, and was chagrined that his quarry had escaped him. He considered that the Brazilian police had not co-operated with him; they had been polite but unhelpful. His journey had been wasted.

Wasted? Perhaps not entirely. That murder of the Englishman in the opium den...curious case. He had spent his last few days before sailing investigating it. It had several unusual features. The killing had not been the result of a brawl or sudden quarrel, but was obviously premeditated. The dead man, known as Howarth Ripley, had an unsavoury reputation. He appeared to support himself by gambling—and probably his skill in manipulating the cards well educated and with charming manners, it was his habit to cultivate wealthy English and American visitors to Rio—greatly to his advantage. He always appeared to have plenty of money which he spent freely.

Purcell had talked to Coutinhos, the man who ran the opium den. He declared that the crime seemed to be one of revenge and deliberate. The victim had been followed into the opium den, stabbed when he was

under the influence of the drug, and, in the confusion that followed, the murderer had escaped.

It was already established that he was either English or American. The detective got the impression that Coutinhos knew more than he would confess. He did not consider that interview—which had taken place with the aid of a police interpreter—yielded any satisfactory results, and at once went off on his own line of investigation. He held at least one piece of satisfactory evidence—the knife with which the dead man had been stabbed. It was a large two-bladed clasp knife, and had been manufactured in Marseilles.

The detective's thoughts, as he leaned against the deck rail, glowering at the retreating vision of the harbour and the line of the Serra do Mar mountains, were interrupted by much bustle on deck.

"Boat drill, sir," said a steward as he ran past him.

Purcell went to his cabin, got his life jacket and joined the passengers who had collected round the first officer on B. deck. He considered them closely. He was always particularly interested in his fellow creatures. At the moment this interest was whetted by the reflection that the man he wanted might actually be on board. The "Montania" was the first ship to sail for England following the murder. It was, perhaps what his Chief at the Yard would term a "fantastic theory" but it had set him studying the passenger list, and now he began to "place" the passengers. Close to him stood a tall, handsome arrogant woman who apparently resented attending the boat drill. She was complaining loudly to the girl who stood beside her. Pretty girl, thought Purcell appraisingly, with character and intelligence. Some sort of secretary or companion, no doubt, to the masterful woman. He decided that he would try to make the acquaintance of the girl. On board ship one could quickly make friends with strangers.

That evening he looked for her in the dining saloon, but in vain. He caught a glimpse of her later when she

hurried past him on deck, but the opportunity for making her acquaintance did not come until next morning when he saw her dragging one of the heavy deck chairs to a sheltered spot on the sundeck.

"May I help you?" he asked taking the cumbersome chair from her hands. "Where do you want it?"

"I want a place that is sheltered from the breeze but gets all the sun...thank you so much."

"You won't find the sun too much for you?"

"Oh, I'm not choosing this site for myself..."

"Then it is for the lady with whom you're travelling...I saw you with her yesterday at boat drill."

"Mrs. Brackenbury....yes." She looked up and down the deck and then back again at him, her eyes plainly telling him that Mrs. Brackenbury did not approve of her chatting with strangers.

"Won't you smoke?" he asked, offering his cigarette case.

"N-not just now, thanks,"

There was a slight pause and then he said bluntly, "You didn't come down to dinner last evening."

She raised her brows, "How could you know that?"

"I didn't see you in the dining saloon."

Sally turned and contemplated him gravely, wondering if the stranger merited a snub. Instead she could only smile at his strong good-tempered face and friendly expression.

"Why on earth should you look for me?"

"I felt I should like to know you. Travelling alone one can feel isolated."

"I shouldn't mind travelling alone," she remarked involuntarily, thinking of Mrs. Brackenbury. "It might be rather fun."

"Perhaps you're right. It may, after all, be rather fun for me on this voyage."

"I hope so," she agreed. "I'm sure it won't be long before you find someone to share your... isolation. You seem to have the knack of making friends quickly."

He laughed. "I believe that's intended for a snub. Forgive me for not being more...formal. And now there's nothing I can do about it, is there?"

"I don't like formality," she said. "It's very nice of you to want to know me....but I'm afraid you won't see much of me during the voyage. My employer takes a lot of my time."

"Do you never dine in the saloon?"

"Oh yes, as a rule—but seldom on sailing day....."

"When I saw you last evening taking that place of sandwiches from the smoking room, I was afraid it was the only meal you were having."

He paused. The smile had faded from Sally's face, he saw that she had flushed.

"I didn't know I was being watched," she said sharply. Then observing his surprised glance, she added, "Excuse me, I must find Mrs. Brackenbury."

He stared after her as she hurried along the deck, drawing his brows together in a puzzled frown. "Now what could I have said to rattle her like that?" he reflected. "Perhaps she thinks I'm getting a little fresh." He would have been surprised could he have known that his words had considerably alarmed Sally. Already she had been observed taking food to her stowaway! That morning he had shared her breakfast. As soon as the stewardess had set down the loaded tray in her cabin, she had knocked on the bathroom door. Clyde emerged, fully dressed, shaved, and showing no outward signs of having spent the night sleeping in the bath.

Sally pointed to the tray. "Don't think I've forgiven you for placing me in the most dreadful position I've ever known," she said. "But since I've promised to shield you I can't see you going without proper food."

He hesitated. "But I told you that I've brought tinned stuff with me. . . . biscuits. . . ."

"You had better keep your iron rations in case they become an absolute necessity. In the meantime, how many lumps of sugar do you take in your coffee?"

"This is immensely kind of you. But it is your breakfast. I couldn't take it."

"You're not going to take all of it. Actually I seldom eat anything more than grape fruit and a strip of toast for breakfast. Now sit down, please and eat the eggs and bacon. You must be hungry."

Sally was surprised to find that she enjoyed the meal. He insisted on her having a full half of the hearty repast, positively coaxing her to eat. The anxieties of the previous evening temporarily banished in the cheerful light of day seemed to have been exaggerated. They talked about themselves; he told her of his holiday in Brazil that had led up to such tragic consequences. Of his friend, Bill Ridgway, who had been such a "grand guy" in helping him to escape. She told him of her own travels and something of her trials in her present employment. Looking at her watch, she realised with a start that it was after nine o'clock.

"I must go at once. Mrs. Brackenbury will be waiting for me. She hates unpunctuality." She jumped to her feet. "Quick, you must hide again."

The anxiety concerning him began to oppress her once more. Now, as she left Purcell and hurried down the deck, she wondered if he had suspected anything unusual in the sight of her taking a large plate of sandwiches to her cabin the previous evening. Foolish of her to show her embarrassment...he must have observed it. What a strain it all was!

"If I don't take it more calmly I shall be in a state of collapse by the end of the voyage," she thought. Before going to seek Mrs. Brackenbury, she turned her steps towards her own stateroom. When she entered her heart began to beat more quickly. The bedroom steward was working there.

"Good morning," she faltered. "You're early?"

"Yes, Madam. We have to be ready for inspection, you know."

Inspection! She had forgotten that...Of course the officers only made a cursory inspection of the cabins...but it was an added danger.

She felt she dare not go away and leave the steward. She could not keep her glance away from the wardrobe. Supposing her stowaway coughed! Supposing....

"Do you want to use the bedroom, Madam?" asked the steward politely. "I could come back later...."

"No, no...please go on with your work," she said hurriedly. "I..I..just wanted to get something out of the drawer."

She pretended to rummage in a drawer. Then, as if unable to find what she sought, she opened her cabin trunk, and turned over its contents.

"Have you lost something?" enquired the steward.

"N-nothing of any consequence. One can never find anything on a voyage...nothing in its right place." Would the man never have finished. She would have to go now. He might suspect if she remained. Suspect what? It was simply absurd to get such fancies, she told herself, as she went out. In the alleyway she lingered, wondering if Clyde in the wardrobe, felt in such a panic as she did.

At last, to her immense relief the steward emerged from the stateroom. Once inspection was over all would be fairly safe for the rest of the day. Remembering duty she went to Mrs. Brackenbury's stateroom. It was empty.

Returning to the sun deck she found her employer settled with rugs, cushions and books in her deck chair. She was chatting affably to a man seated beside her. Sally knew it was Purcell even before he turned his head at her approach. He rose to his feet, a twinkle in his eye. So he meant to consolidate his position by becoming friendly with Mrs. Brackenbury. She hardly knew whether to be angry or amused.

After all, the only thing she had against him was that he was rather too observant a trait that was to cause her considerable trouble before the voyage was ended.

CHAPTER V

THE "Montania" had made ten days of her voyage between Rio and Tilbury without incident—at least that term might have been applied from a navigating point of view. But to certain passengers on board it was fraught with excitement and drama.

To Clyde those ten days and nights had seemed an eternity. The constant dread of discovery, the lack of exercise, the close quarters began to prey on him. He did not object to risk or danger if a coup were to be carried out quickly; it was this prolonged anxiety that played such havoc with his nerves. Sally became the real figure that kept him sane in his isolation. Sometimes he thought that had it not been for her companionship, his mind might almost have given way under the strain of his position.

Sally offered him books to read, but he dared not run the risk of letting his mind, alert for every sound, drift for one moment from the danger of discovery.

As for Sally, though accustomed now to the situation, and less abstracted when on duty, her thoughts turned constantly to the stowaway. Clyde's position and his dependence on her, appealed to all that was maternal and protective in her nature. The feeding of him troubled her, for she felt that his diet was wholly inadequate. She was always planning to smuggle little delicacies to him. Sometimes it puzzled the deck stewards—she had tea alone served on deck—to observe that she cleared every plate on the table before her, and they remarked that for one so slender, she had a "whacking appetite." Once, as a child Sally had secretly sheltered and tended in an outhouse a little stray kitten

that she had been forbidden to bring indoors, and it must be admitted that in some dim way Clyde reminded her of that kitten since he looked to her to protect him.

Had it not been for the gnawing sense of responsibility regarding Clyde, Sally would have enjoyed the voyage. She had made friends with Matthew Purcell and liked his company. Mrs. Brackenbury had few "difficult" moods; never had she seemed so amiable and gracious.

She, too, had made agreeable friendships on board. Mrs. Brackenbury was not an expansive person in this respect, but she was a pronounced snob. She adored titles and often secretly deplored that her late husband who had left her the vast fortune he made in the leather trade, had not also acquired a title. She was at one time on the verge of marrying a penniless Italian count whom she met in Florida, but her shrewd commonsense came to her aid and rescued her in time. Her passion for titles probably accounted for her knowledge concerning the famous and historic houses in England. She took an avid interest in the subject which she could discuss with authority.

It was this knowledge that led to her friendship with Owen Jessel. A tall, thin scholarly man, somewhat shy in his manner, he did not mingle with the other passengers, and it is doubtful whether he would ever have become acquainted with Mrs. Brackenbury had his deck chair not been placed next to hers on the promenade deck. They chatted casually. Discussing the war, he expressed his fear lest "the Priory" might be bombed.

"The Priory? Is that your home?" she enquired.

"Yes. Greystokes Priory."

She sat up in her chair. "Not...not Greystokes Priory in Hampshire—"

"So you know it?"

"I know all about it. I should say it's one of the oldest houses in the country...that it has been in the possession of the Jessel family since 1620..."

"But how amazing you should know all this." His casual manner had vanished, his eyes were kindling. "Yes, one of my ancestors acquired the place when a baronetcy was conferred on him by James I."

"Conferred? I have read that in those days a baronetcy could be bought." Involuntarily she sighed, as if regretting the times when titles could be acquired so easily. "It cost something over a thousand pounds. I think the monarch was very hard up."

He laughed. "At all events that wasn't a high price to demand. But you're wrong in one respect. . . . no Jessel ever bought a title. I'm steeped in the family history."

"Then you are the present baronet?"

"No. I was a younger son. My nephew is the holder of the title. He's on board."

"Indeed?" Mrs. Brackenbury's interest became more marked. "Have I met him, I wonder?" she enquired in the tones of one who might have entertained an angel unawares. "One runs into so many people during a voyage."

"Yes, but he hasn't made any friends on board, I believe. Most of the time he is with his tutor."

"Oh, I have seen him. . . a boy about 17. . . his tutor is a Frenchman?"

"Exactly. Monsieur Raoul Escande. Unfortunately my nephew has always been delicate. He has had to be educated at home. This trip we have taken to Brazil . . . it was largely on account of his health. I thought the voyage would benefit him."

"Is there anything seriously wrong with him?"

"No—nothing organic. He's just growing too quickly and I'd like to see him put on more weight."

I'm his guardian, you see. His father was killed in a riding accident when the boy was five years old. His mother died when he was born."

Mrs. Brackenbury made sympathetic murmurs. "Very sad. To be orphaned so young. And he has inherited Greystokes Priory. . it must be a wonderful old place."

"It is indeed. Not that Reggie—my nephew, you know, has much opinion of it. But I love every inch of the ground, every stone of the building. It is so dear to me that—"he broke off. "But I'm afraid I'm boring you with my enthusiasm."

"I could never be bored with that subject. .please tell me all about it."

Her manner was so convincing that he began to talk of the house once more. Noting his eagerness, the kindling of his eyes, the unconcealed pride in his voice, she realised that Greystokes Priory was his obsession. Listening to his glowing description, she said involuntarily.

"I would love to see the place."

"But I hope you will," he replied heartily. "I should be only too delighted if you could find time to pay us a visit."

Mrs. Brackenbury preened herself. To visit—in the character of a private guest—one of the stately homes of England—was her constant ambition. She was always angling for such invitations, and here was one handed to her without any effort on her part. She melted into such a benign mood that even the sight of Sally strolling past her on deck with Matthew Purcell in attendance caused no shadow of disapproval on her face. Usually she objected to her companion making any friendships on board, but demanded her whole time attention.

Sally, aware of this, felt uneasy when she caught Mrs. Brackenbury's eye.

"I...I...don't think I ought to walk round with you, Mr. Purcell," she said. "The fact is, Mrs. Brackenbury doesn't like me to know people."

He was naturally enough indignant at such an injustice. "I say, why do you put up with that sort of thing? It's outrageous. You ought to assert yourself, to...."

"Never mind about me," she interrupted gently, leading him away from the subject. "Tell me how you enjoyed your stay in Rio. You went there for a holiday, I suppose?"

"No. I went there on business."

Purcell's face grew somewhat grim when he reflected on the nature of the "business" that had taken him to Brazil.

"Indeed?" She waited for him to tell her the rest, for it is on board ship that human beings become most expansive about their private lives even their family secrets, without the least provocation. It may be the result of the sea air. Purcell was usually secretive—the very nature of his calling made him so. But now he longed to tell Sally something of his work, knowing that this would capture her interest. He had observed that most people seemed to think—quite wrongly as it happened—that the life of a detective was fraught with thrilling adventure and tinged with romance. Even if this idea was far from reality, he wanted to look romantic in her eyes. So with just the right air of mystery, he challenged.

"Can you guess what sort of work I do?"

She considered him thoughtfully. "Perhaps you've got a coffee plantation at Campinas?"

"Or a diamond mine at Matto Grosso!" He burst out laughing. "Guess again."

She shook her head. "I give it up. But I'm sure it is something enthralling. You always have such a

keen interested look—as though you liked life and people.”

“That’s true in a way. But as for liking people... I don’t always see the best side of them. I’m a detective.”

“A detective !”

“Exactly. Detective-Inspector Matthew Purcell of the C. I. D. New Scotland Yard.”

He handed her his card as he spoke. Sally sat staring at it, aware that her heart had begun to throb painfully, a definite anxiety thrust itself into her mind. She thought of Clyde whom she was sheltering in her cabin, of the suspicious circumstances of his flight from Rio, the serious consequences if he were discovered. “I...I...never thought you were a...a... detective,” she said in a low voice.

He was surprised to see that she had turned pale, that the hand holding the card was unsteady.

“I’m glad I was able to conceal my job so well,” he commented.

Aware that he had observed her confusion, she went on, “I’m really rather afraid of you now. It’s a sort of phobia, perhaps. When I was a kid my nurse used to frighten me with threats of policemen. . . .”

“You mustn’t condemn Scotland Yard on that account,” he broke in teasingly. “And please don’t say you’re frightened of me.”

“Of course not.” She had recovered her balance. “It’s very thrilling to meet you. I was right, you know, in saying that you look interested in people. I suppose you’ve checked up on all the passengers and can read them like a book.”

He laughed. “I’m not so clever as that. Unless the reading’s easy as in the case of that youth. “He indicated a tall, red-haired boy of about seventeen who

walked past, accompanied by an older man, obviously a Frenchman. "That's Sir Reginald Jessel with his tutor. What I'd call a decadent youth. I don't envy his guardian the job of looking after him. These very old families often produce a specimen like that...the last of the line, usually."

Sally looked after them. "How did you find out these facts...I never know anything about the other passengers."

"No sleuthing necessary, in this case. I met them both in the smoking room and we've chatted together."

There was a pause. Sally put her next question with diffidence. "Mr. Purcell...you spoke just now of your going to Rio on special business. Were you sent by Scotland Yard?"

"Yes."

"Was it...a...a...special case? I suppose I ought not to ask you, but I'm awfully curious."

"It's nice of you to be interested. But it isn't a thing I can discuss with you. Not that particular case. There was another, however, that came my way just before I left. I made a lot of investigations. I can tell you about that. An Englishman was stabbed in an opium den—the murderer got away...." he paused and stared at her. "Forgive me, I ought not to have talked about murder. I can see you are too sensitive. You look upset."

"I'm not so sensitive that I close my ears to horrors. Indeed, I wish you'd tell me—about your investigations, I mean. Do you think you're likely to find the man who did it?"

"I've got a theory."

"Please tell me about it." She was leaning forward eagerly.

"I can't do that—not even to you. But I am remaining in touch with the Brazilian police."

"It...it all sounds very exciting. Yours must be a thrilling life."

"Not unless I can get my man."

His words sent a cold chill through her. She sat very silent staring at the distant horizon, listening to the rhythmic throbbing of the engines. It seemed to weave itself into a phrase... "Not-unless-I-can-get-my-man...get-my-man...get-my-man...the repetition of which was maddening.

A deck steward was coming towards them. He paused before Purcell.

"Mr. Matthew Purcell? You're wanted in the wireless room, sir. Message for you from Rio."

He rose, excused himself to Sally, and strode away. "That'll be a message from the Brazilian police," she thought. "What is going to happen. I feel afraid... terribly afraid."

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Mrs. Brackenbury cared to make the effort, she could be excessively charming. Owen Jessel found her so affable, her manner towards him so flattering, that a firm friendship was soon established between them—the sort of friendship that blossoms so rapidly on board ship, and is so often destined to fade the moment the parties concerned disembark.

"Mrs. Brackenbury is a very intelligent woman," Owen remarked to his nephew. "By the way, she has invited us to sit at her table in the dining saloon, and... but what's wrong now?"

"I say, don't tell me we've got to take our meals for the rest of the voyage in company with that old horse with the pearl collar and the massive chest."

Owen frowned and regarded his nephew with some distaste. "You have a curious way of describing people you don't like, Reggie. Mrs. Brackenbury is most interesting. She has travelled half over the world, and is very well informed."

"Worse and worse. Hope she doesn't get too informative at meal times." A new idea occurred to him. "I say, Uncle, you're not going giddy in your old age, are you? Have you actually fallen for this old girl... never thought you meant to present me with an aunt at this stage."

Owen watched him light a cigarette from the butt end of the one he has just been smoking and commented.

"You ought not to smoke so much, Reginald...it's bad for your health. If you don't take care of yourself

you might not arrive at my years which you are pleased to call "old age". I am exactly fifty, but I'm not going giddy, as you express it. Neither have I any romantic feelings for Mrs. Brackenbury. We simply have interests in common. She shares my love for old historic houses."

"Is that all. True, it doesn't sound very impassioned," replied the youth flippantly.

"I shall feel obliged if you will not talk in that free and easy manner to Mrs. Brackenbury. Do try to show some respect."

"All right, Uncle, I won't let you down. Who's the pretty girl who travels with Mrs. Brackenbury? Is she secretary, companion, or poor relation? Must I also show respect for her?"

His uncle did not reply. Careful, almost meticulous in his own speech, courteous in his manner, the boy's cheeky assurance constantly jarred on him. And to think Reginald's father had once declared that he hoped his son would go into the Diplomatic Service, as it had turned out, anyone less suited for such a career could not be imagined.

"I must speak to Escande...tell him to pay more attention to Reginald's manners," he thought as he made his way up on deck. "He's a disgrace to the name of Jessel...a throw-back...Curious thing, heredity."

"Why, Mr. Jessel, you look as though you've had bad news," called out Mrs. Brackenbury archly. "Why the serious expression?"

"I'm just a little worried that's all." He seated himself beside her.

"I'm worried too...I had thought of going to my house in Hill Street when I get home...now that air raids are threatened, I don't think that plan very satisfactory."

"I should most emphatically advise you not to live in London if it can be avoided," he replied gravely. "Haven't you a country place?"

"I sold it after my husband's death...I travel so much, you know. But I must see about renting a house in a safe area."

"One hardly knows what might be called a safe area in England. I'm afraid we're in for a bad time. But if you would care to come and stay at Greystokes Priory until you have made your plans, I shall be delighted."

Mrs. Brackenbury's eyes glittered, but she made a show of protest. "I feel it would be imposing too much on your kindness...I may be some time before I find the sort of place I want—"

"Exactly. And you won't want to spend that time in the danger spot of London. Please come, with Miss Wyndham and stay just as long as you like. I admit I make the invitation with some selfish motives... it will be such a joy to show Greystokes Priory to one who will appreciate it."

Mrs. Brackenbury murmured joyful thanks. Nevertheless, she considered him with a new speculative light in her eye. The same idea that had crossed Reginald's mind now presented itself to her. Was his attitude to her influenced by something warmer than feelings of friendship? If so, was it affinity..... or was he just hard up, and hoping to marry money?

"In spite of this mercenary doubt, she dressed for dinner that evening with unusual care.

"I shall wear my emeralds to-night," she said, handing Sally her keys.

Sally raised her brows. Mrs. Brackenbury only wore the famous emeralds on special occasions. "I handed those to the purser to be put in the safe—don't you remember? We only have here the jewellery you want to wear on the voyage."

"Well, take the receipt to the purser and fetch the emeralds. They go so well with my silver tissue....."

Again Sally registered surprise. The silver tissue was a costly and beautiful creation, and not actually suitable to wear on board ship.

"Mr. Jessel, with his nephew and the tutor will be sitting at our table in the dining saloon, in future," went on Mrs. Brackenbury. "By the way, I have some news for you. We are going to stay at Greystokes Priory when we get to England...Aren't we lucky to have a place to go to at once; to escape the raids?"

Sally was silent. The idea of going to Hampshire did not appeal to her. It was her intention to get some war work when she returned home. If they went straight to Hampshire her plans would be upset.

How ardently did she wish just then that they were safely in England, the voyage over, and with it the gnawing anxiety concerning the stowaway. The strain was telling upon him to such an extent she had begun to fear that the ordeal might have serious effects. Supposing he were taken ill...how was she to cope with the situation then? His appetite was failing him too, and she had so few opportunities of getting anything tempting.

As she assisted Mrs. Brackenbury into the silver tissue frock, and clasped the emeralds round her neck, her eyes rested speculatively on the dish of fruit that had been brought into the stateroom as usual every evening...smooth peaches, large Muscatel grapes of a translucent green, juicy nectarines. Sally decided to purloin some of that fruit for Clyde, and she lingered until Mrs. Brackenbury had finished her toilette and was ready to descend to the dining saloon.

She gathered up her jewelled bag, cigarette case and cape collared with white fox and swept up to the door.

"Come, Miss Wyndham, if you're ready, we'll go down."

"I..I..just want to get something from my cabin, if you'll excuse me for a moment, Mrs. Brackenbury."

"Very well. .don't be long. . ." she rustled down the alleyway, wafting expensive perfume in her wake. Sally waited for her to disappear then dashed back to the stateroom. . .the next moment she was in her own cabin, locking the door behind her. Here she gave a low whistle, the signal to Clyde that it was safe for him to appear.

"Why aren't you at dinner ?" he enquired.

"I'm going down now. . .Just came in to bring you some fruit."

"Peaches. . .and grapes. . .gosh. . .what a treat. How did you get these. . .you're not robbing yourself?"

"I'm not robbing anyone. Mrs. Brackenbury could never polish off that dish of fruit all by herself." She looked at him wistfully, noting the pallor of his face, sunken cheeks, the lines of anxiety about his eyes. "I feel so worried about you. If only this voyage were over and I could know that you were safe!"

"Please don't worry about me. . .I feel I've been a brute to bring all this upon you. I shall never forget what I owe you."

He did not add that the thought of her had done more to sustain him through his ordeal than the hope of liberty, that those moments when she was free to come and talk with him were so infinitely precious.

"Don't talk about owing me anything. I promised to help you and now we're both in it, only, there's one thing. . .I know I ought not to tell you, it might make you more anxious." She hesitated.

"What is it?"

"There's a detective on board..his name is Matthew Purcell and he's attached to New Scotland Yard and..and ..he was in Rio working on another case when he heard of the murder that you saw—" She paused. Clyde had sprung to his feet and began to pace the floor.

"Does he suspect that the alleged killer might have tried to escape to England?"

"He suspects everybody, I believe. . . it must be his job. There's one thing—he can't possibly find out about you while you're on board. I only told you because I wanted you to be especially on your guard."

"On my guard!" He gave an expressive shrug of his shoulders. "I'm on my guard even when I'm asleep."

Sally turned to him, pity and sympathy in her glance. A sharp knock on the door startled them both. Agile, from long practice, he dived into the wardrobe. She paused for a moment to recover herself before opening the door.

It disconcerted her still further to see, not a steward as she had anticipated, standing on the threshold but Mrs. Brackenbury.

"I've torn the hem of my skirt..will you adjust it for me, Miss Wyndham," she said, sweeping into the cabin.

"Y—yes..I'll do it at once. Sally fetched her repairing outfit. Her hands trembled as she tried to thread the needle, and it needed a supreme effort of will to keep her glance from straying in the direction of the wardrobe."

"Hurry," said Mrs. Brackenbury, tapping her foot impatiently. "How clumsy you are..you seem all fingers and thumbs..do remember that we're late for dinner already."

Sally bent her head over the task her mind working more rapidly than her fingers. Supposing Clyde should ough...or supposing he fainted and fell out of the wardrobe at Mrs. Brackenbury's feet! Confound the woman, tearing her frock..confound this silver tissue material being so difficult to stitch.....

Mrs. Brackenbury's voice broke across her thoughts. "What a very nice cabin you've got.....beautifully appointed. And why, look at the wardrobe."

"The...the *wardrobe*?"

"Yes. Why are you staring at me like that? I was just going to say that I do believe your wardrobe is larger than the one I have."

"I feel sure it isn't --they're about the same size."

Mrs. Brackenbury did not like to be contradicted. "I tell you it's deeper than mine. I'd swear to it. And just to prove my words, I'll measure the difference."

The repair to her dress now being completed, she rose to her feet.

"There's no...no...need to measure...I'm sure you're right," stammered Sally. "Shall we go down now?"

"Yes but not for a moment." Instinctively she sensed evasion in Sally's manner. "First, I am going to measure that wardrobe."

Sally stood before her. "You shall do nothing of the kind."

"Miss Wyndham! You forget yourself to speak to me like that. Have I to remind you that I am your employer."

"Must I also remind you, Mrs. Brackenbury, that this is my cabin and I refuse to have it searched."

"Searched indeed! Hoity-toity. What shall I hear next? I merely ask you to open that wardrobe door."

Poor Sally. Her face was very pale, her heart knocked loudly against her ribs. "I know now what stags at bay feel like," she thought. "I refuse. It's my wardrobe and no one is going to open it without my permission."

Her employer gave a gasp of astonishment. Never had Sally spoken to her in such a way....and shown open defiance.

"There's some mystery here," she stormed. "Miss Wyndham, perhaps you'll explain what it's all about."

Sally lifted her chin and looked the other woman squarely in the eye. "Mystery? What do you mean. Are you suggesting that I've got a man concealed in my wardrobe, Mrs. Brackenbury?"

"Please don't be low. What would you have said, pray, had I made such a suggestion?"

"I should have asked you to search for yourself in that case to prove that you were wrong." Sally suddenly found herself in command of the situation. Her panic departed. "I'm sorry if I spoke rudely just now. It was not intentional..."

"You did speak rudely, and it certainly sounded intentional. But we'll say no more about it."

With a queenly gesture Mrs. Brackenbury rose and rustled out of the cabin. Sally followed. Her expression was meek, but a little smile of triumph hovered on her lips. She hoped Clyde had heard every word of the conversation, and applauded the way she had got them both out of a very tight corner.

CHAPTER VII

THE "Montania" was nearing the end of the voyage. Standing by the deck rail gazing across the broad expanse of sea that melted into the sky horizon, Sally thought of the dangers that lay ahead of Clyde and wondered if he would make good his escape. Luck had been with him so far, but the most difficult part of the plan was still to be negotiated. So absorbed was she in her thoughts that the voice of Matthew Purcell, made her start violently.

"I'm sorry if I startled you," he said half teasingly. "Do you know I've been watching you for ten minutes staring wistfully out to sea...rather as though you were thinking of jumping in!"

She caught at a phrase. "Watching me" She felt uncomfortably that to have a detective watching her was the last thing in the world she desired just then. "You sound as though you are on my track professionally."

"Hardly that...but...will you forgive me if I am very frank. I am certain you have something on your mind."

She paled slightly. "Most of us have, I believe."

"I mean something is worrying you...I say...don't think I've got an awful cheek...but if there is anything I can do to help——"

"Oh, no, no, thanks." He observed that she shrank from him involuntarily and it decided him on the instant that there was a secret she wished to hide. "It's very kind of you...but I don't want any help."

"Well...sympathy, then. I can see Mrs. Brackenbury imposes on you...why do you put up with it? Has she been bullying you?"

"On the contrary, she has been unusually easy on this voyage. Making friends with the Jessels has put her in a good humour. We're going to stay with them in Hampshire when we get to England."

He looked concerned. "I'm sorry about that. I hoped you would be in London."

"I shall get some war work as soon as possible."

He looked at her attractive profile, words on his lips that he longed to say. Instinctively he knew, however, that this was not the right moment to utter them. Sally was always very sweet to him, friendly, and obviously interested in his work. But whether she had any deeper feelings for him, he was not able to decide. Something, too, was troubling and distracting her. It was unnatural the way she started if spoken to suddenly, and at times she had a way of looking beyond him when they were talking as if her thoughts had been switched on to some engrossing problem.

"I hope I shall see you again when we get home," was all he said.

"I hope so, too." There was sincerity in her tone that gave him new hope.

"The deck steward was coming towards them. "Wireless message for you, sir."

Purcell nodded. "I'll go up to the wireless room."

"Do you always receive so many wireless messages when you're on board?" asked Sally involuntarily.

"No...but I have to keep in touch with the Brazilian police...don't you remember my telling you about that case?"

Remember! As if it was likely she could forget. After he had left her she recalled what a panic it had thrown her into when that first wireless message had come for him from Rio. How she had been in a state of unrest for hours afterwards, longing yet dreading to

hear him make a reference to it. Now she did not pay the same attention to the incident. When some minutes later he came striding down the deck again, she asked him quite casually.

"Well, was it anything important?"

"Very important." His face was grave.

"You mean—?" She could not finish the sentence.

He hesitated. "I ought not to tell you. It's what I might call an official secret."

"Please tell me." She laid her hand on his arm. "I'm longing to know. Or are you afraid that you can't trust me with a secret?"

"I'd trust you with anything." For a moment he put his hand on hers. "But there is need for immense secrecy."

"Then—what is it?"

"That murderer I was trying to track down when I was in Rio..."

"The...the...Frenchman?"

"I didn't say it was a Frenchman...merely the knife that stabbed the dead man was of French manufacture. At all events, he's a European."

Relief surged through Sally at the presentation of a new idea. "Then they've found him?"

"Not exactly. But the police have a theory that he's on board the "Montania".

She clutched at the deck rail to steady herself. Absorbed in his theme he did not appear to notice her agitation.

"He might be amongst the passengers...or again he may be a stowaway...if I do find my man, then I shall owe the Brazilian police an apology for accusing them of stupidity."

"What are you going to do?" Sally was surprised that she could make her voice sound normal.

"I'm going to see the Captain...get his permission to search the ship...excuse me now, won't you? I've no need to say that you mustn't mention this matter to a soul?"

"I...quite understand that. But...but...are you taking too much for granted? To search the ship...why...those are extreme measures. It's only a theory is it? And if the passengers got to know..."

"They won't...if you know how to keep a secret."

"Of course I do. But surely it would be easier for you to make enquiries when we arrive home? Before the passengers disembark, naturally...it would cause less confusion...and if you were mistaken, it would be less awkward for you."

He put his hand on her shoulder. "Why should you worry yourself about this?"

"Because...forgive me if I say that it might make you look so foolish if you were mistaken."

He laughed. "I don't mind that...in my job one hasn't to think of these things...Sally."

It was the first time he had called her by her Christian name. She neither observed it, nor the tender inflection in his voice.

"You ought to—for your own sake." Was there anything she could say to turn him from his determination to make a search of the ship. "You must think about that."

"Personal feelings don't come into it when a chap's got a duty to perform. But I must go now. . .speak to Captain Sanders. . ." He moved away. Sally made no attempt to plead with him further. She knew that she had lost.

Purcell found further opposition to the idea of his having the ship searched when he discussed the matter with the Captain.

"I must admit I don't like the idea, Mr. Purcell...if we were certain this chap is on board it would be different. I'll have a careful search made amongst the cargo to see if we've a stowaway. But to question the passengers is going to create a difficult situation."

"I won't ask you to question the passengers, Captain Anders. If you will institute a search below decks and a stowaway is found, I'll undertake to search the cabins myself in company with a ship's officer. . . I shall be most discreet."

"That doesn't sound very discreet. If the passengers get wind of the idea that there's a man amongst them wanted for murder...well, it's likely to cause trouble."

"Not so much trouble as it will cause if the wanted man gets away." Purcell's tone became slightly severe. "I must ask you to co-operate with me in this matter, Captain. You'll admit the matter is serious. But without your help my hands are tied."

"I'll do my best, of course."

"Then we'll begin by going through the passenger list, if you can give me any information on that."

"The purser might help you there. Many of the passengers are known to us...those who travel frequently by our line...we might eliminate those...and concentrate on the ones we know nothing about."

Purcell shook his head. "Those aren't the Yard measures, Captain. Every passenger will come under my careful scrutiny."

"Well, I can only ask you to be as secretive as possible about the affair. It's my belief that this is a false scare."

"And I have a feeling that the man I want is on board...I've got a sort of sixth sense about these things."

"I don't know whether to say that I hope you'll be successful or not." The Captain touched one of

the bells in the panelled wall. "But I'll give orders for a search to be made below decks before you get loose amongst the passengers."

The search brought no result. Neither was the purser very informative concerning the passengers, so Purcell began a line of enquiry upon his own account. With the aid of the second purser, who, it transpired, thoroughly enjoyed sleuthing, he searched several cabins, after making quite sure that the occupant was on deck or in one of the saloons.

They began with A Deck. Before Sally's cabin, Purcell hesitated.

"No need to search this one. I know Miss Wyndham, and—"

"We ought to search them all systematically," the purser replied. "This cabin wasn't booked for Miss Wyndham in the first place...She was on D deck."

"I can't see what difference that makes however, I'll look round...keep watch."

He entered Sally's cabin with a quickening of his pulses. Would she be annoyed did she know that he had made a search without telling her beforehand. But the purser had been right about making the search systematic. He glanced round, in a perfunctory manner, however, and was about to go out of the cabin when his well-trained ear caught a faint rustling sound...He stood for a few moments rigid, listening intently. Then he strode up to the wardrobe and flung open the door.

As Clyde looked straight into the eyes of the detective, his first reaction was that he was glad to be discovered, glad that the tension was over, that he would have a chance to explain his position...then he thought of Sally...He had unwittingly dragged her into this, but above everything her name must be kept out of it. He would say he was concealed in another cabin and had rushed into this other one...that he had only been in the wardrobe for a few minutes when he was

discovered and the occupant of the cabin knew nothing of his existence.

All these thoughts passed like lightning through his brain as he waited for the other man to speak. Purcell did not speak because he was temporarily stunned by his discovery. Then his brain, too, functioned rapidly. Sally had been sheltering this man throughout the voyage...he recalled now her strange nervous manner, her furtiveness, how anxious she had been that he should not make a search of the ship.

Sally—whom he had thought so straight, so direct and honest. All those nights of the voyage she and this man had spent together...God, it was horrible. Sally, whom he loved...and because he loved her, she must be protected. He saw his path clear before him. Later he must act...but not now. He closed the door of the wardrobe and rejoined the purser in the alleyway.

"Nothing there, I suppose?"

The detective shook his head. "No.....I found nothing."

CHAPTER VIII

MATTHEW Purcell, sitting in his room at Scotland Yard was in an irritable mood—a mood that had scarcely deserted him since he had disembarked from the "Montania" a week ago, bitterly aware that his quarry had escaped from him at the eleventh hour.

When the ship docked there had been no sign of the man Sally had concealed in her cabin. He had not anticipated this set-back, and he cursed himself for not taking the man in charge on the instant. What an idiotic impulse it had been, after all, to shield Sally from probable scandal. That mistaken sense of chivalry had lost him the opportunity of bringing off a brilliant coup. As it was, he was unable to give a full and truthful report on the case he had so hopelessly bungled. Not that he meant to relinquish his search.

"I'll find him—no matter if it takes years," he thought savagely.

The telephone bell rang. He lifted the receiver.

"A gentleman to see you, sir. Says you don't know his name. He's got some important information."

Purcell was accustomed to having visitors who were chary about giving their names. "Tell him to come up."

As he looked up when the visitor entered the room, he wondered for a moment if his mind had become listless with brooding on the case of the "Montania" to away.

He stood before him, a whimsical smile on the face, every feature of which Purcell recalled so clearly.

"Say...do I have to introduce myself?" he asked at last.

"No. I remember you well enough. Sit down, please."

Clyde sat down. "I came to thank you for letting me get away..."

"I didn't intend that you should get away," the detective broke in angrily. "And you have no need to thank me...but rather Miss Wyndham...whose good name you did not appear to consider."

The smile faded from Clyde's face. "I'd rather you didn't put it like that. Supposing we leave her out of it? I came here to-day to give you what help I could about that murder in Rio...here are the facts..."

For twenty minutes he spoke earnestly and impressively. Being a journalist, Clyde had an eye for salients, and he put his story so clearly and consistently, that Purcell had no doubt every word of it was true.

"I have been working on the assumption that you were the killer," he said at last bluntly.

"Naturally. After my suspicious conduct—why, I wouldn't have expected my own mother to believe me innocent...I wanted to face the thing out in Rio...but Ridgway said you couldn't trust the Brazilian police to get the right hang of the case...they were quite capable of getting me convicted of murder."

"By God, he was right... of all the blundering fools... but I doubt if I should have chosen your way out... It's the most daring risky thing... If I'd been successful in arresting you on board, I shouldn't have believed your story...but your coming here like this puts the affair in a different light. Now, tell me, did you actually witness the murder?"

"No...I was in a hazy state, as I told you...but not actually dreaming...And I did take particular note of the man on the couch next to mine."

"Could you describe him?"

"Fairly well—because he had a rather distinct face...English in type, with a thin highbridged nose and red hair...." He paused aware of a sudden intention in the other man's manner.

"This is extremely interesting. When I left Rio I took with me a copy of all the papers and documents found in the dead man's apartments. Some of the show that he is in some way connected with the Jess family."

"Didn't Sir Reginald Jessel, the present baronet travel to England on the "Montania?"

"Exactly. It's a curious coincidence, isn't it?"

"He was in Rio the night of the murder."

"No. I've established that. He was coming from Buenos Aires....with his uncle and tutor he had been making the voyage for his health, and the party stayed on board when the ship was at Rio. But what you tell me is of interest, because, it definitely established that the man who was murdered was a relative of the Jessels...the family features, the highbridged thin nose and red hair....noticeable in Sir Reginald."

"What name was the man known by?"

"He had several I gather...shady type, and rather too clever with the cards. He was known in Rio as Howarth Ripley....aged about thirty-five...."

"Unmarried?"

"As far as I can find out...though he was associated with a woman well known to the Brazilian underworld...Cara Matteos, her name is...She lived for some time in Buenos Aires before settling in Rio."

"Do you think the motive for murder was inspired by jealousy?"

"There could be several motives...in the case of a type like Howarth Ripley. He was a "con" man of the

utmost plausibility...his job in life seemed to be to relieve people of their money in ways that were more ingenious than honest. He was, I gather, not above a spot of blackmail when it came in his way...quite a charming specimen, eh? Not one that the proud Jessel family would care to own as a blood relation?"

Probably they don't know of the relationship?"

The detective nodded. "It's doubtful if they are aware of his existence."

Clyde looked thoughtful. "Strange he didn't try to get in touch with the family...that sort of guy usually does...if the family's likely to prove useful."

"He was perhaps holding that for his last card...when his hand lost its cunning, or his confidence deserted him...a nasty bit of work."

"I agree. It's just as well his illustrious family don't know anything about him--and never will, now I suppose."

Purcell smiled. "It's not my business, to spare them. I'm going down to Greystokes Priory to-morrow to see what material I can get for my investigations."

"Can I be of any further use?"

"At the moment, no. You've given me useful information. Of course I'll let you know developments."

"That isn't enough. I...I...wonder if you'll let me in on this case? I've figured in it rather more than I care for so far. Now I'd like to see it through. I think you'd find me of some use."

The detective threw a shrewd glance at Clyde's keen eager face. Then he said drily, "I suppose Greystokes Priory is particularly interesting to you at the moment. Miss Wyndham is staying there."

Clyde flushed with annoyance. "I don't quite place your allusion. I'm interested in crime...so is every newspaper man, I guess. Give me a chance to

get a first hand scoop for my paper. I was mixed up in that murder and it gave me the toughest time of my life...Doesn't it stand to reason that I want to have a shot at solving the mystery too?"

"I see your point." Purcell smiled. Impulsively he stretched out his hand across the desk. "Agreed. But I warn you that if I don't like your amateur detective methods, I'm fairly certain to drop you."

Clyde grinned. "I'm taking a chance of that. Perhaps, on the other hand, you'll find me so expert, I might be led to drop journalism and go in for sleuthing."

"You've already proved that you've got the devil of a lot of courage...ingenuity, too, to escape to England the way you did. And I still don't know how you eluded me at the last. You weren't on board when we arrived at Tilbury."

"No."

"Then I'd like to know how——"

"You've already said you believed my story," broke in Clyde, "so why go into all that now? It....it involves two other people, so that just now I can't give you all the details."

"You mean you won't give me the details? I think you will—in your own time. And now to get down to this other matter. Coutinhos declared that the murder was done by an Englishman...I've a theory that it was a Frenchman—or Brazilian. The latter are very handy with a knife...and this was quite the neatest and most effective stabbing I've ever seen."

"How was it done?"

"The knife entered between the third and fourth rib and pierced the heart—in the region of the left ventricle...Such a blow though proving fatal, would not require an enormous amount of force...only exceptional skill."

"Have you got the knife?"

"Yes. Here it is...what I call Exhibit A." He unlocked a drawer and took out a large clasp knife with a smooth black bone handle. "It was manufactured in Marseilles, and probably purchased there...you see, it's stamped.."

"Any other marks?"

"There are one or two small scratches on the handle...as though the owner had made an attempt at engraving his name....but he only arrived at two definite strokes....they might stand for T incomplete."

"Or F, don't you think?" said Clyde, examining the handle of the knife closely. "There's been an attempt half way down the first upright stroke, to make a smaller one....pity he didn't finish the job."

"It might not have helped us much had he done so...the knife probably changed hands. But it is a very definite clue." And it puts me back to my original theory--that the man we want is a Frenchman. I admit that later I got on to the idea that you'd done the job...after the police in Rio had wirelessly me that they suspected the wanted man was on board."

"I think you'll agree now that I had no motive....trouble with this case is....several people might have had motives for doing this chap in."

"And the strongest of all motives is jealousy," put in Purcell.

"What about the woman with whom he was living?"

"Cara was arrested....they're very highhanded the way they do these things over there. Why, even if your house goes on fire you're liable to be arrested. They couldn't put anything on the woman so they let her go...but she's been watched so that they can check up on her associates. They're sending me a further report on her."

"You've been very active on the case," Clyde rose. "I mustn't keep you...I can guess how busy you are. By the way when do you intend to go down to Greystokes Priory?"

"To-morrow, if I can make it." I've got several other things on hand at the moment."

"May I run you down? I've got a hired car until I can get hold of one I fancy..."

Purcell's expression suddenly became grim. "Thanks for the offer. But I am not taking you with me to Greystokes."

"But I might be of use."

"I doubt it...in that direction. No good you wasting your time."

"Well, I hope you don't waste yours." Good-bye for the present...and good luck at Greystokes." Clyde went out. A moment later he put his head round the door, schoolboy grin on his face. "That's a good slogan of yours, Purcell...the strongest of all motives is jealousy!"

CHAPTER IX

MRS. BRACKENBURY was enchanted with Greystokes Priory. She was never tired of exploring it in company with Owen Jessel who glowed with pride at her voluble praise, his thin aesthetic face lighting up as he told her the history of the priory, and the changes that the years had made in the place.

"The present ballroom, dining-room and hall used to be one vast refectory in the 15th century," he explained. "The cloister-court was made into a sunk garden in the 17th century...a piece of vandalism, I consider."

"If you could have had your way, uncle, you'd have kept the place looking like a blessed monastery all the time," put in his nephew yawning. It was about a week after their return to England, and the boy was in a sulky mood at having to come back to what he called "the foul dullness" of Greystokes Priory after the excitement of the trip to South America. "If I had my way," he went on, "I'd have the whole building demolished and stick up something modern and comfortable."

"But how dreadful!" exclaimed Mrs. Brackenbury... "Is it possible, Sir Reginald, that you have no feeling of pride in such a wonderful inheritance...so full of tradition..." Mrs. Brackenbury was getting into her stride... "so mellowed with time..."

"Perhaps I'd appreciate it better if I was mellowed with time myself...as it is the whole place suggests a prison to me...I never liked it as a kid...the grey walls, the towers, and dungeons. No, I'm not proud of it."

Mrs. Brackenbury glanced with some distaste at the

decadent youth who was lolling in the deep leather chair, the eternal cigarette between his lips, his attitude stamped with boredom.

"My nephew has no feeling for anything old," put in Owen Jessel quietly. "Why, he even despises the old Masters in the picture gallery... portraits of his ancestors—"

"No, I don't despise those, Uncle. They're too valuable for that. One day I'm pretty sure I shall turn them into cash."

"How dare you suggest such a thing...you would sell your birthright...have you no sense of decency, no fine feelings at all?" Owen Jessel had risen to his feet. His usually gentle aesthetic face was kindling with anger, his eyes smouldering. There was an awkward silence. Then, as if recollecting himself and aware that he had created an embarrassing situation, he looked round apologetically. "Forgive me, Mrs. Brackenbury... for the moment I was...er...carried away. But you know, Reggie, you can be very exasperating. Sometimes I think you say these things solely to annoy me."

"Sorry, uncle—nothing was further from my mind. And I do mean what I say...why, those Romneys alone are worth thousands."

"You're only a boy, Reggie—too young to realise the enormity of what you're saying. You shall never sell the pictures."

An ugly look came into Reggie's face. "Who is going to stop me? They're not entailed."

"No. They're not entailed—more's the pity." As if unwilling to betray his growing anger, Jessel, with a muttered explanation of work he had to do in his study, turned and hurried away.

In his own study a sense of peace and calm came upon him. He loved this room with its book-lined walls, Chippendale furniture, the portrait over the

fireplace of Owen Jessel, whom James I had created the first baronet in 1612. For a moment Jessel stood looking at the picture, and thinking of this regrettable display of temper with Reginald. He had been wrong to flare out at the boy like that yet at times he was insupportable. For some moments he paced the room in thought. Then he touched the bell. A servant appeared.

"Tell Monsieur Escande I wish to speak to him."

When the tutor came in, he pointed to one of the deep chairs before the fireplace.

"Sit down, Monsieur. I want to talk to you. About Reggie."

The Frenchman gave him a swift penetrating look, then dropped his eyes. Jessel considered him thoughtfully. He did not like Escande, but was compelled to admit that the tutor was better able to control the boy than any of his predecessors. At times Reggie was prone to wild ungovernable fits of temper; Escande understood how to manage him when these crises arose.

"I don't think the trip to South America has greatly improved him, Monsieur."

"But, you surprise me. I think the voyage has done him much good. He seems to have gained in strength and spirit."

"But not in manners," said the other man drily. "I wish you could instil a little...courtesy in him...not an easy thing, I admit."

"Alas, no. I'm afraid the younger generation doesn't pay too much attention to courtesy."

The younger generation's all right. I'm not speaking in general terms. But's Reggie's behaviour makes me so ashamed. Could you convey to him that his manner is not likely to bring him friends that...that he antagonises people?"

"I have tried to do so already...it is not easy."

"I'm aware of that. I have tried to reason with him...but he resents my suggestions. I believe you have more influence over him than I have." Jessel spoke with some bitterness. "Perhaps in a way I am to blame in the way I have brought him up. I may have indulged him as a child... but he was always delicate...being left an orphan at such an early age. He seemed so... pathetic."

"And now you reproach yourself for being too good-hearted." Escande flung out his hands with an expressive gesture. "There is no one to blame—except, perhaps, the boy's ancestors."

Jessel looked at him sharply. There was a long pause and then he said in an altered voice. "I must admit that there is a bad strain in the Jessel family...its history shows that it comes out in one member every third or fourth generation." He did not add that the fifth baronet had been involved in an ugly scandal when he narrowly escaped a conviction for murdering one of his footmen.

"I don't think Reggie has a bad strain—only that he has been spoiled and...undoubtedly his character is weak. I shall do my best to influence him for the better, Mr. Jessel."

"Thank you, Monsieur. He has certainly been more reasonable since he came under your care."

"I am glad that you think so. It is of great importance that you should be satisfied," replied the Frenchman smoothly. He rose. "I shall carry out your instructions most carefully."

Jessel nodded. He felt more than ever that he disliked Escande, his clothes, the pointed toes of his shoes, his manner and long crafty eyes. "Perhaps I'm a pigheaded type of Britisher who can't endure foreigners," he thought. "I'm not being just to the chap."

Escande, walking with the cat-like tread peculiar to him, made no sound as he went out of the room.

Closing the heavy door softly behind him he at once went in search of Reggie.

"The old man's been giving me a lecture on your account, mon ami. You'll have to mend your ways."

The boy looked alarmed. "You mean he's found out about our little trips to town?"

"No, no, that would be serious. But he thinks your manners need to be brushed up."

"Is that all? He can go to hell!"

"Now, Reggie, keep calm. The vieux is right in what he says. Remember you belong to the aristocracy...you have a name and title to consider."

"What are you beginning to preach now! Come off it, Raoul. You don't always act up to your position, you know. What about a tutor who shows his pupil round the night haunts of London..."

Escande looked furtively over his shoulder. "Douce-ment...you may be heard. If that is discovered we are both lost."

"You, particularly, my boy. Imagine Uncle's face if he knew! He'd probably have a stroke on the spot. And you'd be kicked out, you know."

"You are right. Perhaps it is taking too great a risk. Better if we cease these little jaunts, hein?"

His words had the desired effect. Reggie looked alarmed. "I say, you don't mean that. Cut out the only bright spots I got in life. I was only joking."

"Then I did not see anything amusing in your jeu d'esprit. But, like you, I think that existence in this ancestral home of yours which in appearance is so like a prison—indeed, it would be insupportable if it were not for what you call our little outings."

"What about another one in the near future?"

"To-morrow night, if you like. We'll leave the car in the lodge-keeper's shed in the afternoon."

"All right...and don't forget to give Stacey a good tip...or he'll not keep his mouth shut."

"Oh, the lodge-keeper's all right. He doesn't like your uncle for some reason...he'd probably oblige us without any payment."

"We don't ask him to do anything for us without payment. I'm not exactly hard up, you know...though I shall soon be down to my last bean if I don't have better luck than I had on our last night out. That's the only thing that worries me."

"There is no need to let it worry you, Reggie...you know that Beron is always ready to accept your I. O. U. It is all in order."

"I don't like that old French Jew friend of yours, Raoul...too oily."

"That's ungrateful. He has been such a good friend—"

The boy laughed unpleasantly. "Friend! I like that. He isn't lending me money for friendship."

"No...but he is lending you large sums of money that he cannot hope to recover until you come of age. He is taking a grave risk. Surely you do not begrudge him his percentage?"

One phrase struck sharply on Reggie's ear. "Lending me large sums of money, did you say? I've only given him I. O. U's for a few hundreds."

For a moment the Frenchman looked uneasy. Then he shrugged his shoulders. "That was only a form of speech. After all, a few hundreds do represent a large sum to one who has such a modest allowance as yours."

"It's true. Uncle's a mean old swine to keep me so short. Wait till I inherit. He'll know then who's master."

"In the meantime he, as your guardian, is master and you will have to—what you English say—hold a candle to the devil. Ah, but it might have been much worse, Reggie. He does not notice what you do...He always has his nose in his ancient books, and the history of the fame which he is writing. True, he keeps you short of money, but my friend Solomon Beron exists for gentlemen placed in your position. So why get angry about these matters?"

"You're right. Good thing Uncle goes about with his eyes shut. All the same I don't want to get too much in debt. I've got a feeling that I shall win tomorrow night. Are we going to the same place?"

"No...that was getting too hot. The police were nosing round...we don't want to be mixed up in anything unpleasant if the place were raided. But this place I know of...it's all quite safe and discreet. And now you will promise to be more polite when your uncle's about, *hein*? It would get me into favour, too, you know. He thinks I have a good influence over you."

This was not exactly the case. After the Frenchman had left him, Owen Jessel sat meditating for some time on his conversation with the tutor, and wondering if it might not be advisable—in spite of the way he handled the boy in his dark moods—to replace him by an English tutor. An athlete who might inspire his charge with a love of games and outdoor life. Escande, obviously did not care for these. Reggie needed an open air life, too....

A knock on the study door interrupted his reflections. A servant entered carrying a card tray. "There's a gentleman to see you sir. Shall I show him in here?"

Jessel took up the card. With a puzzled frown on his brow he read, "Detective-Inspector Matthew Purcell, C.I.D. New Scotland Yard."

CHAPTER X

WHEN Jessel rose to greet the detective as he was shown into the room, his puzzled frown deepened.

"Why, Mr. Purcell, I'd no idea when we met on the journey from Brazil, that you were a detective. And when your card was sent in to me...I thought you'd come on professional business...to enquire about a body in the library, eh?"

Purcell laughed. "The body's much further away than your library, Mr. Jessel. As it happens, my visit is what you term professional."

"You intrigue me...sit down, won't you..." He pushed a box of cigars towards his visitor. "I hope the matter you want to discuss with me isn't very serious... you belong to the C.I.D...."

"In a way my visit is impersonal," Purcell hastened to explain. "I am searching for details of the Jessel family history."

The other man's face cleared. "Then, indeed, you have come to the right quarter, Mr. Purcell. I can call myself an authority on the subject...I'm even compiling a book about it. Now fire away with your questions."

"In the first place I must explain why I want these details, Mr. Jessel. A few nights before the "Montania" sailed for England a man was stabbed to death in a den in a low quarter of Rio. An Englishman who went by the name of Howarth Ripley."

"Indeed? These things occur too often. I'm afraid. But I really don't see what this has to do with..."

"I'm coming to that. Howarth Ripley was only an assumed name. I've established that his real name was Norman Jessel."

Jessel now looked seriously concerned. "You mean that he was a member of our family?"

"Undoubtedly."

"But this sounds quite incredible...oh, forgive me, I don't want to cast any doubt on your suggestions, Mr. Purcell. Only I think it scarcely likely that there should be a Jessel of whose existence I know nothing."

"How could you know anything about him...he has lived abroad under another name for years."

"But I should be bound to know his origin. In fact, so deeply interested am I in the family history that had I known of the existence of this man I should have taken every step to find him. Surely you must be mistaken?"

"I'm afraid not. The murdered man, too, had the traits of your family...the red hair, thin highbridged nose...more noticeable in your nephew than in you, if you'll excuse my mentioning it?"

"Yes. Reggie is a true Jessel." Involuntarily he sighed.

"And here is a conclusive proof. This ring belonged to Howarth Ripley."

Jessel took the ring eagerly. "Good God! The family crest. This is too astounding..." He sprang to his feet. "You must forgive me if I appeared to doubt your story. It seemed a little...shall I say, fantastic..." He seated himself again and looked keenly into the detective's face. "Tell me more about the dead man who was our kinsman...was he a bad character?"

"He was. Thoroughly rotten, in fact, and you ought to congratulate yourself that he's out of the way. But it's my business to track down the murderer. I've

got a theory that the victim was followed to the den and deliberately stabbed..."

"For what motive, do you think?"

"I could find several motives. Before I go on the case, I'd like to know more about the dead antecedents." We might find out to what branch he belonged." Jessel rose and from a bookcase took down a massive volume, bearing on the leather the Jessel coat of arms in gilt. "Here is the genealogical tree..." He turned the thick pages. "This is where you will find the descendants of the last fifty years...No, you said...that's a Christian name not common in the family."

Purcell was examining the book...This Frederick Jessel who married Ruth Neame in 1908...the only son.

"Yes. The child died when it was six months old. Frederick was my cousin. He was killed in the last war in 1917. Do you think I might have documents likely to help your investigations?"

"I don't think so. Do forgive me for bothering you...it was just an idea I had." The detective smiled up. "Hope I haven't taken up too much of your time."

"I am most deeply interested. If I can help in any way, please call upon me. But," here he lowered his voice, "unless it's absolutely necessary, I hope it won't be made generally public that the dead man bore such a bad character was a member of my family. Family pride is something of an obsession with us, perhaps it is wrong—"

"Why, that's only very natural, Mr. Jessel. It isn't likely you'll hear much more about that affair. Rio...I shall keep you posted about everything in the course."

"I should appreciate that...please keep in touch with me. You're not in a hurry, are you? I hope to stay to lunch with us."

Purcell accepted this invitation with marked eagerness. The thought of seeing Sally again temporarily banished from his mind the real object of his visit to Greystokes.

He wondered if she would be pleased when she met him. He found her sitting on the Terrace with Mrs. Brackenbury, who exclaimed in astonishment when she saw him striding towards them.

"Why, is that Mr. Purcell, who was on board." She shook hands with him effusively. "What a coincidence meeting you here."

"I came to see Mr. Jessel on business," he said, bending over her hand. His glance turned swiftly to Sally. She was regarding him with a startled expression. The sight of him brought back the painful incident on board ship when she had sheltered Clyde...why had he come here? Perhaps it was on account of that business...perhaps he still suspected Clyde of murder and had come to question her.

"How are you, Miss Wyndham?" He was looking at her wistfully. "I hope you haven't quite forgotten me?"

"No indeed...it's good to see an old shipmate," she faltered, with an attempt at lightness. It troubled him to see the apprehension in her eyes.

Mrs. Brackenbury raised her jewelled lorgnette and considered them with an arch expression in her eyes.

"If you want to have a stroll through the ground with Mr. Purcell, I shan't require you before lunch," she said graciously.

Amazing, indeed, was the change that had come over Mrs. Brackenbury since she had arrived at Greystokes Priory, and although Sally suspected this melting mood was only temporary, it made life with her much more endurable.

The friendship between Mrs. Brackenbury and her host had deepened; she never seemed to tire of hearing

the history of the Priory, and he became daily more expansive on the subject. He was an indefatigable guide even taking her to explore the dungeons and subterranean passages. He glowed at her enthusiasm for the place, like a parent hearing the praises of an adored child. The bond between them seemed so great, that latterly Mrs. Brackenbury had grown unusually thoughtful, had taken to studying her features critically in the mirror, and told herself that she was not too old for romance. If heavily built, she was still handsome and had a presence which she considered "commanding". She would be a fitting wife for Owen Jessel, she decided, and do credit to his name.

Her aggressive manner disappeared, she became tolerant and amiable—as objectionable people so often do if it serves their purpose. Now, she positively beamed on the retreating forms of Sally and Matthew Purcell, as though suspecting a budding romance and revelling in the idea.

She might have been surprised could she have observed the constraint that fell over them the moment they were alone. Sally found herself looking at him almost furtively, while the question she most longed to ask him could not be raised until he touched on the subject. Had he made any further enquiries about Clyde Moncrieff? Did he suspect that she had sheltered him for the whole of the voyage from Rio?

Purcell, aware that some of the warmth and friendliness had gone out of her manner, felt rebuffed. Vainly, he sought for the reason. Then one theory presented itself.

"Have you heard anything of that stowaway since you got back to England?" He enquired...

"No," replied Sally. There was a bleakness in her voice that she could not conceal. The disappointment she felt at Clyde's silence had turned to bitterness. Had those weeks at sea when they had been drawn together by a common peril, been nothing to him?

Could it mean that he had exploited her, thinking only of his own safety, and was too indifferent even to send her a line to tell her of his plans, or show some feeling of gratitude?

"I'm surprised that you haven't heard from him." He gave her a shrewd glance.

Sally lifted her chin determined to continue the bluff she had put up at their last interview. "Why should I? How could he know of my movements since we landed?"

Sally! Why don't you own up...why don't you admit that you sheltered Moncrieff for the whole trip.

She caught her breath. "Why...how do you know?"

He laughed with some bitterness. "I didn't...only you've just told me."

She drew away from him, her eyes flashing. "So you trapped me into saying that. I think I ought to congratulate you...you're a very cute detective."

He caught her arm. "Please Sally, don't talk like that. You might have confided in me, you know. I might have found out the truth earlier—saved you a whole lot of anxiety and myself a lot of time and trouble."

"The—truth?"

"That your stowaway was innocent of the murder in Rio."

"But of course...I never doubted that for one instant...How should I have sheltered him otherwise?"

"I'm afraid you've rather a trusting nature," he said drily. "You took a great risk, but—gosh. I must say I admire your pluck. And the way you bluffed it out when I discovered him...for a time you actually convinced me."

Sally began to laugh. She looked up at him and now there was a warm friendly light in her eyes. "You've forgiven me?"

"I'd forgive you anything." With his hand still on her arm he drew her to his side. "It's great seeing you again...I've missed you so much."

An idea occurred to her. "Tell me...did you come down here to-day to...to...see me?"

"To be perfectly frank, Sally, I came to make some investigations about that murder . . ."

She drew away from him with a little shiver. "Always when I see you, we discuss...murder. And how can there be the remotest link between that affair in Rio and the people living here in Greystokes Priory. The idea's absurd."

"Not so absurd as you think."

"You mean.....?" She turned her face to him puzzled, startled.

"I mean that already I have got a very important clue."

CHAPTER XI

"WOULD you like to come with me to see something of the night life of London?"

Clyde considered Matthew Purcell with an amused smile. "I'd like it no end...if it's a reputable night life. Last time I went to a low joint to get experience it landed me in a whole lot of bother."

"It won't be reputable," replied the detective. "But I'll see you're kept out of trouble."

"Thanks a lot. But what's the idea about to-night's razzle...do you feel like running riot, or is it just a matter of business?"

"I'm afraid it is business. But that needn't prevent you from enjoying yourself...you might get copy for your paper."

"Looks as though you mean me to enjoy myself...getting copy!" There's more behind your plan than that...anyhow I'm ready to start right away."

The two men, who were dining at a restaurant in Jermyn Street, had met to discuss what Purcell described as "a new angle" on the murder case he was investigating. Clyde seemed keenly interested in his visit to Greystokes Priory.

"Did you see Miss Wyndham?" He asked eagerly.

Purcell at once assumed the mantle of the inscrutable detective. "I saw her, of course, since she happens to be staying there. But I didn't look for evidence in that direction."

"I never supposed you would." Clyde decided to drop the subject of Sally. "When do we start seeing the night life?"

"It doesn't begin until after midnight...so in the meantime we might see a show...or what about a game of snooker...do you Americans play it?"

"Sure we do—and beat you at it, too!"

"Right. That's a challenge."

Two hours later a taxi crawling through the darkened streets took them to a tall house of dignified appearance in Park Lane. As they mounted the steps to its imposing entrance Purcell remarked.

"You'd better take back those words of yours about a 'low joint'... This might be described as one of the stately homes of England...rented for the moment by a slick and enterprising gentleman known as Monty Trafford. He's got the right sort of background for his activities."

As they entered the big square hall a sleek black-haired man in evening clothes stepped up to them. Purcell exchanged a few words to him in low tones, then turned to present Clyde.

"This is my friend, Mr. Wilson. An American on his first visit to London."

A sudden glint came into the man's eyes. It has been said that British crook and con. men are, in their particular line, the smartest in the world. But they cannot seem to dissociate an American anxious to see night life on his first visit to London, from a pigeon ready to be plucked. The stranger now beamed on Clyde.

"I hope you'll spend an amusing time with us, Mr. Wilson. I think your friend, Mr. Milroyd, brought you to the right place for that." As he spoke he beckoned to a man-servant who came up and relieved

them of their hats and coats. Clyde had been a little surprised to hear himself addressed as "Wilson", and Purcell as "Milroyd" and also to observe that the detective spoke with a rather broad accent.

"I'm supposed to be a well-to-do woollen manufacturer from Bradford," he murmured to Clyde when they were, for a moment, alone. "The hard-headed Yorkshire man, eh? But a bit soft-headed they imagine when I get amongst a crowd like this."

They had now passed into a large room where dancing was in progress. On a small raised platform a coloured band was playing "hot" music. There was a sprinkling of uniforms of the various services amongst the dancers. The girls were lovely and very soignée. It all looked decorous, with no suggestion, Clyde thought, of "wild" night life. Purcell gave him a wink.

"This is just a sort of blind...wait till you get into the gaming rooms."

"Would you care to dance? Mr. Wilson?" enquired their host.

Purcell answered for him. "I don't think dancing is quite in his line...he'd like a little flutter."

The man nodded understandingly. "Then we will go into one of the other rooms." At that moment a waiter came up to them carrying a tray. "You'll have a drink, won't you? There's a highball. . . ."

Clyde took the glass and sipped appreciatively. "It's good too...first I've had since I came to your country...everything in the liquid line here seems slightly warm."

Purcell drinking deeply from a stiff whisky and soda remarked. "You Americans don't know how to drink, Cy. Fancy spoiling good whisky by putting cracked ice with it."

They all laughed and the man—whom Purcell addressed as Monty—now led them into a smaller room on the right.

"Would you like a game of Chemmy, Mr. Wilson, I'm going to play baccarat, if you care to come my table."

"Which do you prefer?" Clyde asked Purcell.

Purcell was looking at the players round the green baize covered tables with a swift keen glance, as though searching for someone.

"Eh, but I like roulette. It's grand," he said. "We'll start with that, anyway, Cy."

"That's in the other room. You know they don't you? See you later," said Monty as he moved.

In the adjoining room they found a larger, more animated crowd round the roulette table. They both bought counters and entered into the game. Clyde, trying to edge his way nearer to the table, felt a hand laid softly in his arm. He turned to see a girl, who looked scarcely more than eighteen...with blonde hair and a soft babyish mouth, smiling up at him.

"You're new here, aren't you?" she asked.

"Yes. Why?"

"Only that newcomers always bring me luck... you put these on for me?" From the small velvet bag she carried, she took two counters of the value of ten shillings each... "One on red—the other on impair."

He nodded, amused, and flung the counters on the table. The banker rolled the ball.....

"Red has turned up!" The girl clapped her hands like a happy child, and then clutched at the counter she had won...*please*...the red again, and manqué."

This time, however, she was not lucky; Clyde, on the other hand, who had backed Number 21, won.

She pouted. "I should have followed you...I can see you are lucky...what shall you back next?"

"The black, I think, and impair."

"Then put counters on for me, too."

"He did so, and they both lost. Unfortunately, she had forgotten to give him the counters for her stake. She continued, however, to instruct him as to what numbers she wished to back. She—or, rather Clyde as he was providing the counters—began to lose.

"I must buy some more counters," he said, moving away from the table. At that moment Purcell clapped him on the shoulder.

"I've been watching you, lad...your end of the table seems damned unlucky...better come and share these with me." And he chuckled as he showed a pile of counters. Then he steered Clyde to another part of the room. "I thought I'd better separate you from that vamp," he added in a low voice "she'd take the skin off your bones. But she can see that I know her game."

Clyde shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not such a mutt as you think. I saw through her game, too.....I'd always be suspicious of baby blue eyes in a joint like this." Suddenly he gripped Purcell by the arm..... "why...what an extraordinary coincidence."

"What is it?"

"Do you see that boy...at the front of the table in the middle, just leaning forward..."

"Yes?" The detective's voice was sharp.

"He's got an extraordinary resemblance to that guy in Rio who was——"

"Knifed?" The detective's voice had dropped to a whisper.

"Yes. It's an unusual face, isn't it. Of course he looks much younger, but the features are almost iden-

tical. And that isn't all...that foreign looking guy with him with the slanting eyes...I've seen him before.

"Can you remember where?"

"Let me think. It was some place in Rio." He drew his brows together in an effort of memory.
"Wait...I've got it now. It was in the Casino at Copocabano....he was playing *Campista* with a part Brazilian."

"Was the boy with him then?"

"No.....I've never seen the boy before...but it's resemblance that struck me. Perhaps I've got that at on the brain. It's just a strange coincidence."

"Not so much as you think. Now, do you know why I brought you here to-night?"

"On your business, I suspect."

"In a way, yes. You know, I've been trailing the couple recently."

"You know who they are?"

The detective nodded. "Yes. You don't. And particularly wanted your first impressions when you saw the boy whether you would see that resemblance. He rubbed his hands cheerfully. "We've done a good night's work."

"Speak for yourself. I think you ought to give me some explanation."

"All right, my boy...later on...Let's clear out here."

"Not before you've told me something of the mystery. Who is the boy who seems to be gambler rather recklessly and the foreign looking guy with him?"

"The boy is Sir Reginald Jessel, Bart., to give him his full title—and his companion, the Frenchman with the sly eyes, is Sir Reginald's tutor, Raoul Escande."

CHAPTER XII

OVER the luncheon table at Greystokes Priory there hung an indefinable air of gloom. Reggie—usually somewhat offensive in his talkativeness—had not spoken a word since the meal commenced. His face looked jaundiced, he regarded with distaste the food that was set before him. Anyone only slightly experienced in such matters would have declared that he was suffering from a pronounced hangover. M. Escande, who sat beside him, looked less jaundiced but equally gloomy. Mrs. Brackenbury, too, was markedly silent. From time to time she studied Reggie and M. Escande and then glanced in a puzzled way at Owen Jessel. But, he was absorbed in thoughts of his own. Looking down the table he remarked abruptly.

"A party of evacuees is coming this afternoon."

"This afternoon! Why, this is a surprise." Mrs. Brackenbury came out of her reverie. "You naughty man to have kept it such a secret." She shook a playful forefinger in his direction.

Jessel raised his brows. "A secret...why I thought you all knew...forgive me...I should have told you earlier. I assure you they will not in the least disturb you. I have been discussing the matter with Mrs. Meaker, the housekeeper, for some days. They are to occupy the South wing...they will be to themselves...no doubt they want privacy as much as we do."

"Where are they from?"

"Stepney...mothers as well as the children."

"I wish I could help...I'd love to do something for the evacuees." Sally broke in then glanced anxiously at Mrs. Brackenbury. Did not her time belong wholly to her employer? To her relief, Mrs. Brackenbury smiled graciously.

"Yes, that is a good idea." Turning to Jessel, she added, "This invasion of evacuees will make a lot of extra work for your staff. Perhaps Miss Wyndham may be of service."

"I should appreciate it. I am certain, Miss Wyndham, you would be invaluable...organising and...er...all that. I'll speak to Mrs. Meaker after lunch."

"Thank you so much." There was genuine gratitude in Sally's voice. She had not felt happy since she arrived at Greystokes Priory. She was restless, longing to do war work, and had privately planned that when this visit was over she would leave Mrs. Brackenbury and join one of the women's services. As soon as the meal was ended Jessel sent for Mrs. Meaker who, obviously pleased to have extra assistance, bore Sally off to the South wing to inspect the arrangements made for the reception of the evacuees. Reggie hurried out of the room, accompanied by Escande. Mrs. Brackenbury and Jessel were alone.

Mrs. Brackenbury seemed, for some reason embarrassed. She gave a short cough and when she spoke it was with unusual diffidence. "I wonder, Mr. Jessel, if I might have a word with you about...well, it's rather a difficult matter to discuss...but it's about something that you ought to know."

"Certainly...shall we go to my study? The servants will be coming here soon to clear the table, and would interrupt you." If he was puzzled at her remark, he was too well-mannered to show it. Settled in one of the deep leather chairs in his study, she waited until he had lit her cigarette, then, still slightly ill at ease, she began to speak.

"I hope you won't think I am interfering in a matter which ought to be no concern of mine, Mr. Jessel. But I feel sure that it is in Reggie's interests as well as your own—"

"Reggie's interest," he interrupted sharply. "What has he been doing now?"

"That is for you to find out. Last night I was unable to sleep. I was feeling a little—er—nervy." It would have been nearer the mark to have said that she had indigestion from eating too heavy a meal. "Finding sleep impossible, I decided to read. It must have been about 5 o'clock in the morning that I heard a high-powered car coming along the road. It is so intensely still down here in the night, and it was the only sound I had heard for hours. The car seemed to me to stop at the lodge gates. Then, after a time, I heard footsteps coming along the drive. I felt curious. Switching off my light, I pulled back the black-out curtains and looked out. It was misty and dark but I was able to see two figures cross the Terrace and evidently go round to one of the side entrances. I...I...recognised them."

Jessel rose to his feet, looking gravely perturbed. "You mean that it was my nephew and—and—"

"And his tutor, Monsieur Escande," she concluded.

"But you might have been mistaken...it might have been two of the servants...you could not distinguish them clearly...forgive me if I seem to doubt your story, Mrs. Brackenbury, but I can hardly credit this."

"You mean, perhaps, that you don't want to credit it," she replied shaking her head. "Unless I were absolutely certain I should not have mentioned this matter to you at all...As you know, M. Escande walks with a slight limp; Reggie has a tall quite distinctive figure. There is no mistake about it, I assure you."

He nodded. "Forgive me...but I feel so distracted at what you have told me." He paced the room in agitation. "What can be behind it?"

"If you'll allow me to speak my mind.. Mrs. Brackenbury was an expert at this form of revelation. It was obvious that whether she was allowed or not, her confidences were not to be checked.

"Please go on, Mrs. Brackenbury."

"...Then I must say I think your faith in that French tutor is misplaced. He is the last man in the world should select to have the care of a boy who requires such careful training as Reggie."

"But I assure you he came to me with the highest recommendations."

"His face doesn't recommend him," she said drily. "He has a sly look. He is leading that boy into evil ways, I am convinced. Reggie had a night out last night and must have been drinking heavily...didn't you notice that he was suffering from a hangover to-day?"

"I thought he was not looking well—but he has always been so delicate and had his "off" days...It never occurred to me that..." he paused.

Mrs. Brackenbury made a movement of exasperation. As guardian of Sir Reginald, she decided Jessel was far too absorbed in the history of Greystokes Priory and the family archives and not sufficiently observant of his charge.

"Reggie will have fewer "off" days if that tutor is sent off altogether," she said with an unexpected flash of humour.

"I will speak to him...go into the matter without delay." He ran his fingers through his hair with a distracted gesture as he spoke and Mrs. Brackenbury saw him look wistfully at his desk littered with manuscript and reference books. She was shrewd enough to know what was in his mind. He shrank from the upheaval of dismissing Escande and finding another tutor for Reggie. It would hold up his work, interrupt his researches. He was, obviously far more interested in

the dead and gone Jessels than the present baronet who was living!

"I shouldn't waste any time in making an enquiry," she remarked significantly.

"An enquiry! If what you say is true...there is only one course open to me. Escande must go. Yet...he is the only one who has ever been able to manage Reggie in the outbursts of ungovernable temper he has from time to time.

"Is there insanity in the family?" enquired Mrs. Brackenbury.

Jessel flushed and looked annoyed at this question, which he considered an impertinence. There were blots on the family escutcheon which he had tried to conceal as far as possible in the history he was compiling.

"There is no question of insanity in Reggie's case," he said distantly.

Mrs. Brackenbury was not sensitive, and quite unaware that she was being rebuffed, just then.

"That's one of the indications of insanity," she declared, believing that she was being helpful. "Those outbursts of temper...occurring periodically...are a very grave sign. Have you ever taken him to a mental specialist?"

"I have never considered that necessary."

His words were so curt, his manner so distant that even Mrs. Brackenbury began to think she must appear tactless.

"I'm very sorry if my remarks seemed indiscreet," she said, rising. "Perhaps I ought not to have told you that I saw those two coming home in the early dawn. But I thought it was something you should know."

"Indeed, you did right to speak of it. And I am most grateful to you."

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"I have never considered that necessary."

His words were so curt, his manner so distant that even Mrs. Brackenbury began to think she must appear tactless.

But as he opened the door for her to depart, she glanced at his face, and was swiftly convinced that he was not in the least grateful.

"He thinks I've been trying to interfere in a matter that doesn't concern me," she thought. "That is what you get for trying to be helpful!"

CHAPTER XIII

SOLOMON BERON'S office though small had an air of luxury that amounted almost to opulence; Solomon himself—as befoved a man who was willing to lend his fellow creatures anything from £1 to £1000 on their note of hand alone—wore a perpetually affable smile.

He smiled now as he considered his caller, fidgeting in the deep leather chair which faced his desk.

"I much regret, Monsieur, that I cannot accept any more of Sir Reginald Jessel's I.O.U's."

"You won't advance us...I mean him, any more money."

"That is exactly what I mean."

"But why? Vous n'avez pas raison...the boy will inherit an enormous fortune—"

"If he inherits," put in Beron drily.

"I don't understand. You never raised this point before. And you don't make any advances without the most careful enquiries. There is no doubt about his inheriting."

"So I thought. But there is a factor that neither of us appeared to have considered, M. Escande. I saw the boy the other night at Monty's place. It struck forcibly then, that he looked extremely delicate, & that if he goes on as at present he will not be able to stay the pace."

"You're afraid he'll die before he attains his majority? Quelle idee...c'est ridicule." Escande shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "There must be something els

"There is nothing else. I have made what I consider one of my rare mistakes in advancing this money, Monsieur...the boy is a minor...I could not recover a farthing if he died before coming into the estate."

"Just as you wish. Need I remind you, however, that on his prospects, he could raise money in other quarters."

"Probably. That is no longer my affair. And since you are arranging these matters on his behalf I must tell you that I wish to redeem the moneys I have advanced to Sir Reginald."

Escande sprang to his feet with an exclamation: "You can't do this."

Beron's smile became more marked. "I can't, you say? We shall see when I have presented the L.O.U's to Sir Reginald's guardian."

Escande dropped back into the chair again. His face had gone a sickly yellow hue. His hands were trembling. "It...it...wouldn't be any good, Beron... Old Jessel would never pay...he would make an example of your methods....."

"You think so, *hein*? I shall have to take the risk of that. What I do not intend to risk is losing my moneys. I shall take action at once."

"N—not at once...you must give me time to find this sum..."

"It is fairly considerable..." Beron glanced at some papers beside him on the desk. "One thousand, four hundred and twenty-five pounds to be exact."

"As much as that, *mon dieu*! Isn't there some mistake?"

"You can see the figures for yourself...there is my interest to be considered, you know."

There was a silence. Escande, his elbows on his knees, his face buried in his hands, considered. At last he looked up.

"I have an idea."

"That is good."

"If you give me a little time, I think I see a way to raise the money."

"How much time...Believe me, Monsieur, this matter is urgent. I am a business man, not a philanthropist."

"No one ever suspected you of being a philanthropist," said Escande looking at the other man's bland oily face with an expression of hatred. But as what you call a business man, you must realise that you do risk losing all you advanced if you take the matter to the boy's uncle. I should lose my job. So you see, for all our interests, it is better that I should be given a chance to get the money for you."

"How do you propose to do this?"

"That is my affair."

"It's my affair, too, it seems. I don't want to be put off with excuses and promises." Beron looked shrewdly at the other man. "Sir Reginald has not had the whole of the money, I take it?"

Escande shrugged, and turned his head aside, avoiding the money-lender's glance. He made no reply.

"Has all the money—gone?"

"Of course it has...Think I've got a secret hoard somewhere?"

"I...understand." Beron considered him thoughtfully, nothing the restless eyes, the long thin fingers of the born gambler. "You've been teaching that boy bad ways, Escande," he added abruptly. "He has vices enough of his own, I'd say, without adding gambling to them."

Escande rose to his feet. "How the money has been spent is not your business, Beron. I shall see t

it that those I.O.U.'s are redeemed. I give you my word of honour."

Beron nodded, looking sceptical about such doubtful security. "Never mind about your word of honour. How soon can you pay me?"

"That may take some weeks...I cannot say. I only know that a way out has occurred to me. Only give me time...you must give me time."

Solomon sat for some moments in thought. He had a quality often found in money-lenders he was something of a psychologist. He knew that the Frenchman was not bluffing, that he had, in mind, some definite plan for finding the money.

"Very well," he said. "I give you a few weeks, as you ask."

Despite this concession Escande's mind, during the whole of the journey from London to Greystokes was racked with anxiety. Grave issues faced him. Everything now depended upon how Reggie would react to his plan. There was bound to be difficulty.. lucky he knew how to handle the boy. If only he did not come up against that curious obstinate streak in his nature.

On arrival he went straight up to Reggie's study. Seeing his pale troubled face, Reggie demanded.

"Hello...anything wrong?"

"Lots. Old Solomon won't advance us another sou, the cochon."

"Why?"

Escande was careful to withhold the reason. "Oh.. he's got the idea that he doesn't want to wait so long for his money."

"Let him go to blazes. There are other money lenders..."

"Yes...but these are difficult times. The war has made all the difference. I doubt if I could negotiat

with anyone else. I have known Solomon Beron for years. When I introduced him to you, it was quite easy to get the loans...after I had explained the position to him."

"But he's sure of his security...that's all these blighters want isn't it?"

"He wants a great deal more, Reggie...the whole of his money back within a few weeks. We've got to find it somehow."

"Rot. We can't find it...unless we have a run of luck...we might, you know. "If I'd kept on the red last time I should have come home with a packet. You know I've got a little system of my own, and next time-----"

"There won't be any next time, Reggie. We haven't anything to gamble with. And if we don't get the money for Beron he threatens to tell Mr. Jessel everything."

Reggie started. "Tell...uncle...I say, you're only bluffing."

"I'm not. It's the truth. He means it, and we've got to find some way out of this mess."

"We must find a way out...if the old man got to know he'd made my life hell. For the next few years he'd have me watched as closely as if I were in a concentration camp...There's only one thing to be done..."

"Eh bien?"

"I'll have to sell the car...it'll cramp our style, Escande, stop our trips to town for a time, but we'll think out some way to get over that."

Escande's face did not express unbounded relief at this very simple solution. "That's no good, mon ami."

"No good...what do you mean? She'd fetch four hundred anywhere."

"It...it...isn't enough." The assurance had gone out of the Frenchman's voice.

Reggie swung round. Suspicion blazed in his eyes. "How much do I owe?"

Escande raised his shoulders and flung out his hands. "I was about to explain."

"What is there to explain? I only want to know the figure."

"It's...it's more than you expect, Reggie...I...I... didn't want to worry you...we always had a chance of doubling what we'd borrowed."

"How much, damn you?"

"Fourteen hundred pounds."

"God! You can't mean that." Reggie ran his fingers through his mane of red hair... "You said we had not gone beyond a few hundreds...what's become of the money? I haven't had it."

"You've had more than you believed, Reggie. And you know our plan was to share the profits...if I hadn't had such a cursed run of bad luck, we would have been well up and have some hundreds to play with..."

"Don't talk damned rot...looks to me as though the whole thing's a plot...you suggested we should get advances...you introduced Solomon Beron to me... and, as far as I can see you've had most of the cash. But you'll pay it back, you rat, or I'll shake the life out of you."

Reggie's voice had risen to a thin high-pitched scream. The muscles of his face were quivering, the pupils of his eyes were dilated. Escande knew the symptoms of the ungovernable fits of temper which at times possessed the boy, and decided to act at once before he became violent. He went up to him, put his hands on his shoulders and spoke in a low soothing voice.

"Don't get angry with me, Reggie, until I have explained everything...Remember I've always been your

friend. We shall get out of this bother if we only pull together. Please trust me."

His long narrow eyelids seemed half closed, but his eyes were fixed on the boy with an almost mesmeric stare. Very gently he pushed him into a chair..."Sit down...I'll get you a drink..."

"Make it a stiff one then," mumbled Reggie sullenly.

From a hiding place behind some books in the cupboard Escande took out a bottle of whisky. Before pouring out the spirit he put in the glass a rather larger shot than usual of the dope which so quickly soothed Reggie in these crises, and had given Escande the reputation of being able to handle his outbreaks better than anyone else.

Reggie had become quite docile again when Escande once more broached the subject of Beron's loans. It would have been better, he knew, to avoid it for a day or two... but there was no time to be lost, and his plan to return the money required Reggie's co-operation.

"I know a better way out, mon ami than your suggestion of selling the car. That would be an unnecessary sacrifice...besides how could you do it without your uncle knowing and questioning you? No, I have another idea...a perfectly simple, straightforward idea——"

"What is it? I see nothing straightforward about this business, Raoul."

Escande ignored this comment. "Ecoutez. In less than four years you will inherit a big fortune...Greystokes Priory and everything in it—*everything*."

"What about it? All I know is that nearly four years is the devil of a time to wait..."

"Then...why wait?" Escande had drawn nearer to him, his voice had dropped to a whisper.

"What are you getting at?"

"Why not sell something that belongs to you, Reggie...something that will put you in funds for a long time to come and pay off Beron as well."

Reggie sat up in his chair. "Is that all...and you talked of a good plan. You suggest I should sell one of the family pictures under the very nose of Uncle. What rot."

"I never mentioned pictures, Reggie...I was thinking of something else."

"Something else?"

"Yes...the Glastonbury diamond."

CHAPTER XIV

[THERE was a tense pause after Escande had spoken; then Reggie flung himself back in his chair with a retulant gesture.

"I sell the Glastonbury diamond! It would be easier, I imagine to dispose of half the old Masters in the picture gallery. If that's your idea, you'd better think again."

"I have thought very carefully."

"Surely you know the Glastonbury diamond is an heirloom in the family...it's got a history of its own and all that...I could as soon get hold of it as the moon, you silly ass." You don't know what you're talking about."

"Ah, but I know perfectly. I know, too that the family jewels are kept at the Bank...all except the diamond which your uncle keeps in the safe in his study...I know, too, the legend that it must not leave Greystokes Priory or bad luck would fall on the place...always there are these foolish superstitions about famous stones. As it happens this one suits our purpose very well.

"Suits our purpose?"

"Yes. This is my idea." Escande paused a moment. With his handkerchief he mopped the moisture that had sprung upon his brow. "You must get hold of that stone, Reggie...I know how we can dispose of it...we'll get a good price, too. It is of much value."

Reggie stared at him. "I say, have you gone off your rocker? How am I to get hold of the stone?"

"Take it from your uncle's safe."

"Do you mean...steal it?"

"Ma foi, what a suggestion! How can you steal an object that is yours by right?"

"Well, it isn't mine yet and I can tell you there isn't an earthly chance of my getting my hands on it. I say, why don't you have a shot at annexing it, since you think it's so easy."

"But, my friend, if I was caught in the act of taking it...if it were found in my possession why I should be arrested for stealing...whereas if you were discovered with it, it could be passed off as a boyish prank. There would be no question of punishment in your case. But...there is no need for any discovery to be made."

"No discovery—when uncle finds it has been taken!"

"He needn't know about it. Your late mother had the gem set in a bracelet. This we will take to London...we can have the diamond copied...the bracelet can be replaced in the safe...and no one—except ourselves, need be any wiser."

Reggie was silent pondering over the plan. He passed his hand distractedly over his brow. The drug had made him feel hazy, he had a strong disposition to sleep.

"That was a pretty stiff shot of whisky you gave me," he remarked yawning.

"Yes, yes, you needed it to pull you together. Now, tell me, do you agree?"

"Shouldn't know how to open the safe."

"I shall get your uncle's keys."

"But how——"

"Never mind. That is my part in the affair."

"You seem to have thought of everything. You're a pretty bad egg, you know, Raoul. How much is the diamond worth do you think?"

Escande gave him a swift glance from beneath his narrowed lids. "Oh...quite three thousand pounds, I'd say."

"I'd an idea it was worth more than that."

"Probably. But the way I shall have to sell it...the fee we must pay to the man who does the fake...it's all very different from selling a gem on the market in the ordinary way."

"Three thousand, eh? Perhaps it's worth trying for. It would be putting one over Uncle, anyhow. I've seen him show the diamond to people...it'll be funny to see him gloating over a fake and spouting about its history." He gave an unpleasant laugh.

"Ah, Reggie you have the right spirit. You are what you call in England, a sport."

"I'm not sure that Uncle would call me that."

"Never mind what your uncle thinks...he is not understanding of you...he gives you too small an allowance. He does not care about you."

"There's no love lost between us." Reggie yawned again. His eyelids felt heavy. He threw himself back in his chair. At that moment there was a knock on the door and a maid-servant entered. She looked at Escande.

"Mr. Jessel would like to speak to you in his study Sir."

Escande rose to his feet. "Thank you. I'll come at once." When the girl had gone out, he turned to Reggie, "Wonder what it is. Something wrong again... Perhaps it's your deportment that's at fault now..."

"Silly old blighter," murmured Reggie sleepily. Escande went out softly closing the door behind him.

When he entered Jessel's study he found him pacing up and down the room, and looking perturbed.

"Please sit down Monsieur," he said curtly.

Escande glanced at him sharply. Jessel was invariably courteous with him, and he felt vaguely uneasy at this abrupt greeting. He waited in silence.

Jessel's first words were not reassuring. "I have a very grave complaint to make against you, Mr. Escande, I have reason to believe that you are not worthy of the trust I have reposed in you."

The Frenchman lowered his eyes. "Please explain more clearly. I do not understand."

"Two days ago you were seen with my nephew creeping back here in the early dawn. You had his car out, you had probably been to London. That same day I observed that Reggie bore traces of having drunk too much...he looked a wreck...Monsieur, this is a great shock to me...that you should have led him astray...you, his tutor...However, nothing I can say will undo the wrong you have done. It is sufficient to add that I wish you to leave Greystokes immediately...without, if you please, seeing my nephew again."

He spoke stiffly, impressively. During his speech Escande had done some rapid thinking. He had a quick alert brain and was at once ready with his reply.

"Mr. Jessel, you do me the greatest injustice," he said with actual hauteur. "When you know the truth you will, I feel sure, apologise to me for your cruel suspicions."

"I know the truth. I want no excuses."

"Pardon me, you do not know the truth. I had wished to keep it from you—in your nephew's interests. Yes, and yours, too, for if the affair blew over, then you would have been saved great anxiety."

"What affair?"

"I found out by the merest accident that Reggie was having a...a...liaison with a barmaid at the Anchor...over at Littleford...She is a most undesirable person. Amongst other things she encouraged him to drink

heavily when in her company. Of course, when I first heard of this I should have come to you at once...but most foolishly—perhaps from a sense of chivalry...I decided to settle the matter in my own way. I have a great deal of influence over Sir Reginald, as I think you will admit. I meant to get him away from this woman. And I believe I have succeeded. But even now we must show the greatest tact...Your nephew has a very stubborn nature and will not be driven. You see how difficult my position has been."

Jessel sat at his desk and for a moment rested his head on his hand. He sighed heavily before replying.

"You did wrong to keep this matter from me, Monsieur. You exceeded the rights of your position. But I have no doubt about your motives. I...I...owe you an apology."

"I, too, must apologise, Mr. Jessel, if I have presumed on my position. I did what I thought was for the best." He spoke smoothly, but his thoughts were disquieting. He would have to prime Reggie in the part he must play, should his uncle question him about the alleged affair. Supposing he refused to be accused of disgraceful behaviour when he was innocent? Supposing, on the other hand, Mr. Jessel, made searching enquiries into his story and discovered it to be false? He knew there were many flaws in his plan, but it was the best he could think of on the spur of the moment. And it had one advantage that it sounded fairly plausible.

Then something happened that he had not anticipated. Mr. Jessel, looking exceedingly stern, rose and touched the bell at the side of the fireplace.

"We must talk this matter over with Reggie at once," he said.

The Frenchman was aware that his heart was pounding uncomfortably. "But...forgive me...is that wise? I have his confidence. I have already promised him that I will not mention that matter to a living soul

He will think that I have gone straight to you with the story...and he will never trust me again."

"Don't let that worry you. I shall explain to him that it was a question of knowing the facts or your dismissal. It was your duty to tell me."

There was a knock on the door and a servant appeared.

"Tell Sir Reginald I wish to speak to him at once," Jessel said. Then he turned to Escande. "I don't intend to be too hard on Reggie. I would rather that he confided in me. I have never been unduly strict with him. Why should he try to deceive me?"

"In such a case as this, it is only natural. And I am certain that if you speak to him about this affair now, all I have done will be in vain. I know Reggie. Out of sheer perversity, he will refuse to obey."

"Refuse! I shall see that he doesn't refuse."

"Did you not say just now, Mr. Jessel, that you don't intend to be too hard on him...that you want to get his confidence. There are other ways than this. When this matter has blown over, when he has forgotten the woman, then he is more likely to be reasonable."

The urgency in his tones caused Jessel to look at him with raised brows. "You are taking this matter very much to heart, Monsieur."

"Because I believe I understand Reggie better than you do—don't think me impertinent for saying that. And I know the right line to take with him in a delicate situation like the present."

Jessel, for some reason, looked offended. "Glad you do. When Reggie comes in I shall have an opportunity to see what line you take with him. No doubt I shall find it helpful for other occasions when he is difficult."

Escande knew he was beaten in the contest of words. He was silent, clenching his hands tightly and

bracing himself for the ordeal which lay before him. Reggie, knowing nothing of the story he had put up, would unknowingly betray him....

The heavy door swung open noiselessly, the servant appeared again.

"I'm sorry, Sir Reginald is asleep, sir...I tried to rouse him...but...he seems in a sort of stupor..."

Escande got up quickly. To Jessel he said on low tones, "I can explain..."

"It doesn't matter," Jessel said to the servant... "There's no need to rouse Sir Reginald just now."

"Very good, sir."

"When the man had gone out, Escande put in before he could be questioned.

"It's true...he is in a sort of stupor. He went into one of his rages...was getting violent so I gave him a sedative."

"You must have given him a big dose."

"He reacts very quickly to bromide. When he awakes you'll find he's quite reasonable."

"In that case we had better leave this discussion until to-morrow."

"Just as you wish, Mr. Jessel." Escande rose, gave a stiff little bow and with his cat-like tread went out of the room. In the corridor he paused to wipe the moisture from his forehead. "Echappe d'un mauvais trou," he murmured, or as Reggie would say, "That was a very close shave!"

CHAPTER XV

THE impression that the first glimpse of Greystokes Priory made on the evacuees was not favourable.

"Coo, Mum, it's a gaol, aint it?" asked one small urchin. And looking at the grey towers and austere lines of the ancient building he drew closer to his mother. This impression rapidly vanished with the warm welcome they received. Their quarters in the South wing were extremely comfortable, gay with flowers in every room. Sally had selected the books and toys for the children. Her kindly heart was struck with pity when she saw the pale pinched faces of the little East-enders, and the shabby tired mothers. Not that they appeared at all depressed, for the cockney spirit is irrepressible.

As Sally came forward smiling a greeting, she observed that a Press photographer was with the party. Evidently a newspaper wanted a "story" about the arrival of the evacuees with the historical Greystokes Priory as a striking background. As they prepared to group on the Terrace, Sally saw a familiar figure, a tall man with a freckled good-humoured face. Her heart missed a beat. It was Clyde Moncrieff. What was he doing here? Evidently he had come with the party... indeed he seemed to be in charge of it. At the moment he had taken a refractory baby from a mother who had three other youngsters clinging to her skirts. With the baby in his arms he helped to arrange the group and catching sight of Sally, called out, "Hi, would you like to hold this kid...you can help to fill the picture if you like."

Sally laughed outright. "I suppose this is what we should call Yankee assurance. Why are you down here?"

"Oh....for several reasons...you might wipe that kid's nose..."

Sally laughed again as she took out her handkerchief. Life seemed to have, quite suddenly, taken on a gay and hopeful angle. "But do explain," she began.

"Never mind explanations now...do you mind introducing me to Mr. Jessel? And...remember...you and I have never met before."

Mr. Jessel was standing on the Terrace looking at the evacuees with a beaming paternal air...Sally went up to him with Clyde following.

"Mr. Jessel, this is Mr. Moncrieff...an American."

"I'm a journalist," explained Clyde. "I came down with this party to-day to do a story for my paper in New York."

Jessel extended his hand. "How do you do? I'm very pleased to meet you, Mr. Moncrieff. I like Americans, though I sometimes wonder if I'm too British to understand them."

"And I like the British because I believe I do understand them," replied Clyde neatly.

They all laughed and Clyde added, "Actually, Mr. Jessel, I wasn't only thinking of my paper when I came down here with this party. I wanted the privilege of seeing Greystokes Priory for myself. I claim to know something of its history."

In a flash Jessel's polite and casual air gave place to a livelier expression. His face lit up, he turned eagerly to Clyde.

"You—an American know something of its history! Have you been long in this country?"

"Only for a short time. But a great many Americans have a deep interest in ancient buildings...perhaps more than you folk have because we are a new country. I have heard that you are writing a history of Greystukes. I'd like to know more about that..."

"And I should be glad to talk to you about it. And when you've got your party settled in, I'll take you over the Priory myself."

"Thanks a lot, Mr. Jessel. I shall be immensely interested."

"We'll meet at lunch, then. I'm looking forward to a talk with you."

As Clyde moved away with Sally beside him, she murmured.

"So that's the kind of man you are...you've just been exploiting his weakness...I don't believe you know any history of Greystukes..."

"That's where you're wrong. I've spent a whole lot of time in museums searching records recently." His eyes twinkled.

"I shall tell Mr. Jessel you're an impostor."

"Sally!"

"I don't know when I gave you permission to call me that..."

"Perhaps you didn't give Purcell the permission either...but he hasn't waited for it."

She flushed. "Now I'm getting really angry."

"Why? Are you angry with me because I've moved Heaven and earth to get down here. It wasn't easy. If I hadn't read that paragraph about evacuees going to Greystukes Priory I might not have got here after all. I went to the right quarter...got permission to accompany the party to write up the story for America...so I've got to see you after all."

"You might have done that with considerably less trouble. And...you might have thought of writing to me...I told you I was going to stay here."

His face lit up. "Gosh it does me good to hear you say that...If you weren't interested in me, you wouldn't be so sore now, because you think I've neglected you."

She shrugged her shoulders. "I suppose I was interested in you...after the weeks we spent together in my cabin on the "Montania"...You had rather less confidence then," she added pointedly.

"Don't talk like that. And don't be sore at me because I didn't get in touch with you earlier. I had a reason. Why, I'll never forget all my life what an angel you were to me. You've never been out of my mind for a moment since I last saw you."

Sally flushed at the ardour in his voice. Her voice was softer as she asked hesitatingly, "And you really went to the trouble of working out such an elaborate plan...just to see me again?"

"I've been living for the moment when I'd see you again, Sally. But I must be frank. You're only one of the reasons why I'm here today."

"And—the other reasons?"

"I can't speak of them...not at the moment. Even to you."

Sally felt indignant. "I don't like mysteries..." She moved away from his side. "Excuse me, won't you...I have promised to go and help the evacuees to settle in their new quarters."

"Of course if you must go...but I hope to be seeing you a lot within the next few days."

"What do you mean? You're going back to town after lunch, surely?"

"No, Sally, I'm not. I had thoughts of staying at that picturesque little inn. The Blue Boar, in the village. That is, if I'm not invited to stay here."

"Stay here! Why, you're a complete stranger to Mr. Jessel."

"At the moment, perhaps so. But after lunch... after I've been round this ancient pile with him...after I've steeped myself in the history—"

"Stop talking like a guide book and tell me what your deep plans are. I'm positive there's some mystery about all this and I don't like it."

"You've just said you didn't like mysteries...Sally, if only you knew how lovely you look with your eyes flashing like that. Why are you angry with me?"

"Because you're so evasive...because you obviously don't trust me with your secret. You trusted me with your life when you were on board the "Montania".

"I'd trust you again with my life. But this secret isn't my own...I'm not free to discuss it with you..."

"In that case I must try not to be curious. Some day perhaps you'll tell me what it all means."

"Sure. Some day. I will, Sally."

She hurried off in the direction of the South wing. He watched her with a tender smile. For a moment he fell into a gentle reverie. Only for a moment, however. The recollection of the part he had to play within the next few hours jerked him back to realities.

"Better if I refresh my memory and be ready for the old boy if he should spring any awkward questions on me," he muttered. From his pocket he took out a small note-book, the pages of which were covered with notes he had made on the history of Greystokes Priory.

CHAPTER XVI

MATTHEW PURCELL was reading a letter that had been sent to him at Scotland Yard. It was a long letter, and its contents, judging by his expression, were absorbing. It was written in Clyde Moncrieff's neat journalistic hand, and despatched from Greystokes Priory.

"Don't be surprised to see my present address," he wrote. "You wouldn't bring me down here when you came, so I had to think out a plan of my own. It worked fine. The idea was not just to spend a few hours here, but to so ingratiate myself with Mr. Jessel, he would ask me to make a stay. You told me his weakness—that he's just crazy about the family and this old place—and you were right. He's sure got it on the brain. I did some spade work before I came down, looking up all available records about the priory and, when he showed me round the place on the day I arrived, I let off some of my information.

"Boy, you should have seen his reactions. He was so stirred at my interest I thought he was going to weep. It made me feel kind of mean....but I've found out already that detectives (even the amateur kind) don't have to have any finer feelings. (don't take this as personal; you know what I mean). The result was that I'm now fixed up here as a sort of permanent guest with full permission to root amongst the family archives—which suits my purpose fine. You see, I've been thinking hard since that night we spent together at Monty's joint, and things I couldn't understand before are getting clearer. There are things going on here that need investigation. That French tutor to Sir Reginald

is running a dirty game. He should be watched. I'm doing that. In this way I'm in luck, because Reggie has taken a liking to me. We're great pals already. I feel sorry for the kid. Seems to me his home life has been somehow neglected, and about the last guy I'd choose for his tutor is that rat, Escande.

I've been questioning Escande in a roundabout way about his movement in Rio, the last time he was there. I must admit he seemed quite frank with me, and was interested to know I'd spent some time there. And here's an important item of news...he was friendly with Cara Matteos, the woman you said associated with the murdered man. Of course, as you said, she's fairly notorious, but it set me on a new line of thought. I've been sleuthing Escande and here is one result.

When he and Reggie went out riding yesterday morning, I did a little investigating in the Frenchman's apartment. He seems pretty careless, even leaving his desk unlocked. Searching amongst his papers I discovered some fairly lurid sidelights on his past. He was deported from his own country in 1931 owing to some espionage charge. I don't know why he has kept proofs of such a discreditable affair, unless he thinks that they might be useful one day if he runs up against the Nazis. What interested me more was to find a wax impression of a safe key and a letter from a Solomon Beron referring to a sum of money that has been advanced on Reggie's account. So you see there's what you'd call some pretty sticky affairs going on.

"This detective business is making me observant. I've noticed that Escande has a habit of marking as many of his possession as possible with his initials. There was a small ebony ruler on his desk, and he had scratched the letter 'E' on it with a sharp pointed instrument. Owing to the hardness of the surface, the result wasn't good. The markings were something like those on the knife you brought with you from Rio and which was taken from the murdered man's ribs. On the ruler the letter is scratched something like this :

Take away the final stroke at the bottom and it would resemble what you described as standing for the letter 'F' on the handle of the knife. It suggests that he might have started to scratch his initial on the bone handle, and not completed it. In any case I think the marking on the ruler ought to be examined under the microscope and compared with those on the knife handle. It might lead to some important development in the case.

What about your coming down here, bringing that knife along? What about confronting the Frenchman with it, and watching his reactions? I'm only just making suggestions; I don't want to seem to be interfering with C.I.D. methods. Anyhow, here's my report to date, and I think you'll agree that I haven't been idle since I came down here. And there's a whole lot of things I mean to find out yet.

All the best,
Yours,

Clyde Moncrieff.

P. S. Sally's looking fine.

CHAPTER XVII

SIR REGINALD JESSEL was pacing the floor of his study with a desperate expression on his face. Escande was watching him, his crafty eyes glittering, a faintly contemptuous smile on his lips.

"Eh bien, Reggie why make so much fuss over a matter that for you has so very little danger. It is I who am taking the risk."

"You say I'm taking no risk in rifling Uncle's safe...why don't you get hold of the diamond yourself?"

"I have already told you of the impossibility of that plan."

"That's right...leave the dirty work to me."

"Si, c'est sale!" The Frenchman sprang to his feet. "But on whose account is this dirty work to be done...yours! I borrow money on your account...and now when I plan how to pay it back for you without your uncle getting to know...you call it dirty work."

"You can say it's honest if you like. But this I do know...I should never have been landed in this mess but for you."

"So now you play the innocent, *hein*? It was not you who begged me to relieve your ennui by showing you some of the bright spots in London night life. Yet I seem to recall that it was you who were so eager about those nocturnal outings of ours."

"Well. what of it...I only wanted a bit of fun."

"And you had it, didn't you? You can have more... but it's fun that has to be paid for."

"You must think of some other way...I tell you I daren't do this."

"So you're a coward. Are you?"

A deep flush mounted Reggie's brow, his eyes flashed dangerously. "You dare to call me that." He advanced towards the Frenchman, his hands clenched. "Damn you, I'll kill you...kill you, do you hear? Cowards don't kill...they're afraid of murder—"

"Stop, Reggie...what are you saying?" Escande had turned a sickly pallor. "Murder....have you taken leave of your senses? If I called you coward just now...then I was not thinking of what I was saying. I apologise."

With a sullen expression, the boy turned away, but not before he had caught the look of hatred in Escande's eyes. Yet when he spoke again it was in silky tones.

"Well, are we friends again, Reggie?"

"I'm not sure that you are my friend."

"Ingrat! You would have a dreary enough life of it but for me."

"At any rate it was...safe. Now I feel that I'm living a lie...that beastly story you told Uncle about my having an affair with a barmaid."

I had to think of something on the spur of the moment to explain our absence that night."

"You thought of something that let you out all right. You didn't have to be sent for, lectured for hours like a schoolboy, almost prayed over. And as if that were not enough the old man says I can never be sufficiently grateful to you for getting me out of an ugly scrape."

Escande gave a low chuckling laugh. "You admit, mon ami, that my ideas are good? And next time we

go off for a night's outing we will take care not to be seen when we return."

"I'm not so keen on the night life any more. I always lose money and the drink makes me feel like hell next day."

"Comme vous voulez. But we've got to pay the reckoning for the night life we've already had. Now... what about doing that job...to-night?"

"No. I've got to think it over...it isn't easy..."

"You fool, nothing could be easier. I've done everything that matters—got a duplicate key of the safe... Your job won't take two minutes. Just open the safe with this key, get the bracelet and we'll take it up to town tonight. We'll have the bracelet replaced with the fake stone before it's missed..."

"N-not to-night." He stared at the key in his hand. "How the devil did you get hold of this?"

"Does it matter? That's my part of the transaction."

"By God, Escande, you're nothing but a crook...and you're making me a crook like yourself. Listen...I'm not going to do this job."

"Yes you are, my friend. You will do it because I order you. I have had enough of this useless talk, these protests. I tell you I am desperate and mean to have the money. You will get the job done to-night. And if you refuse..." his tone became coldly deliberate... "then I go to your uncle and tell him...everything. You wouldn't like that, would you?"

"You can't do that..." the boy's voice rose a shrill scream. "Whatever I've done...you're implicated, too. You're a skunk to turn on me like this...try to make me a thief..."

"Silence! Do you want to be overheard...You are not a thief if you take what is your own...And you will take it...to-night."

Something in his tone swept away the boy's defiance. Cowed he turned away, muttering:

"Tell me how I must set about it."

"That's better. I thought you would see reason... Now, listen...this is what you have to do..."

The instructions were simple enough. Yet as Reggie crept down the wide main staircase at two o'clock in the morning, he felt he was about to undertake the most difficult task of his life. He started at every sound, his hands were trembling, his knees felt that they would give way beneath him. The torch he carried cast a beam of light ahead, but in the piling shadows all around he imagined there lurked the form of his uncle. Reaching the study, he felt more reassured after switching on the light. He cast a quick furtive look round, took the duplicate key from the pocket of his dressing gown, then pushed back a panel which revealed the safe in the wall.

It was an old-fashioned type, easy to open. Almost the first object he saw as he swung back the door was the broad flat leather case containing the bracelet. Reggie snatched at it eagerly. Escande had been right... everything had been quite easy...there hadn't been the lightest hitch in the arrangements. All he had to do now was to get back to his room where Escande would be waiting for him...with a double whisky of which he felt he stood in great need at the moment.

He pressed the spring and opened the lid of the box. The bracelet lay on a bed of white velvet. He had seen the Glastonbury diamond before, but never had been so impressed by its beauty as now. Oblong in shape softly yellow in colour, its brilliance seemed to make it like a living thing. He stood staring at it, thinking of its intrinsic value rather than of the ready money it would fetch to get him out of an awkward scrape. Some faint stirring of better feeling moved his selfish heart. The diamond was an heirloom and had been worn by the women of his family for

hundreds of years. It was said that the luck of the family was centred in the stone...but, of course that was a foolish superstition. People in these days didn't believe in that rot. Certainly he did not. Yet how deeply did he regret that the diamond must be sold. He snapped down the lid...no use thinking of that now. It *had* to go...there was no other way out. Escande—the swine—must be obeyed. This was the price of his silence. . . .

"Excuse me," said a voice behind him.

Reggie swung round with something like a yelp of fear. He hardly knew whom he expected to see. It was with some slight relief that he saw it was Clyde Moncrieff, the American chap, whom he liked and considered a sport.

"W-what do you want?" he stammered, quickly slipping the leather case into his pocket.

Clyde came into the room, an easy friendly grin on his face. "It's a bit of luck my finding you up. Fact is, I couldn't sleep. Thought I'd make my way down here to get a book on heraldry which your Uncle lent me last night...I forgot to take it up with me...It should be in this bookcase.....may I get it?"

"Of course....." Reggie breathed a sigh of relief. His tone was even causal as he added, "A book on heraldry...gosh, I'd think that's the right thing to get you to sleep."

"On the contrary it'll keep me awake. I'm interested in the subject, you know." With a bland expression he considered the open safe. "What a remarkable thing...I've so often sat here with Mr. Jessel, and I've never observed that safe before."

Reggie flushed uncomfortably. "You're not supposed to...Er...I mean, it's usually concealed by a panel in the wall...so." He closed the safe and slid back the panel.

"Ah, yes. Most ingenious. I suppose these old houses are full of secret doors and sliding panels. By

the way, would you think it great cheek to ask if you would get me a drink?"

"Not at all...I could do with one myself. I believe Uncle keeps it in this cupboard." He opened the door of a tall-fronted cupboard and took out glasses and a siphon. "Whisky?"

"Thanks. I say, I'm not keeping you up, am I?"

"Not at all...I couldn't sleep either...but I didn't come down here for a book on heraldry," he added. "The fact is——"

"Curious thing, insomnia," said Clyde breaking across his explanation. "It's like a sentinel in the brain that is guarding against the invasion of sleep. When I have these wakeful spells, I never attempt to combat them. It's the easiest way." He raised his glass. "Well, here's how!"

Reggie's alarms and fears melted away under Clyde's easy manner. As they sat chatting he chuckled to himself as he thought of Escande waiting for him to return and full of alarm at the unusual delay. At last Clyde got up.

"I think you ought to get back to bed," he said kindly. "You're looking tired."

Reggie ran his hand nervously through his flaming hair. "Yes, I'd better turn in. Can I give you a light up to your room? I've got a torch."

After leaving Clyde, he returned to his own room where he found Escande looking exceedingly perturbed.

"Diable! What have you been doing all this time?" he demanded harshly. "I thought something had happened...I thought you had bungled the affair..."

"You don't give me credit for much sense, do you?"

"Did you get it?"

"Yes."

"Ah, mon brave, but that is excellent. Now the rest is easy...give it to me..."

With a contemptuous glance at the Frenchman's greedy expression and glittering eyes, Reggie thrust his hand into the pocket of his dressing-gown....

The leather jewel case had gone.

"S-something's happened," he stammered. "It isn't here...."

"Don't you start those tricks with me...Hand over that bracelet."

"I tell you it isn't here. I distinctly remember slipping it into my pocket when the American came in....."

"What...you mean to tell me someone saw you !

"Oh...he didn't notice anything amiss. I could tell that. He'd just gone down to Uncle's study for a book it was all quite natural and he didn't seem a bit surprised to see me there...I suppose I got a bit nervous and instead of putting the jewel case in my pocket it dropped on the floor. I shall have to go down again and look for it."

"So! You dropped it on the floor and now will have to go down to get it...Ma foi ! What imbecility. I planned that everything should be so easy for you...and you could not even do your small part in the affair. Quick, go down again at once..." He paused. There was a low knock on the door.

"Sapristi ! Who can be there?"

"I'll go... it may be only one of the servants." He threw open the door.

Clyde stood on the threshold. He looked apologetic. "Hope I'm not disturbing you...but I forgot to give you this." He held out the leather jewel-case. "You dropped it in the study.....I picked it up and I'm dashed if I wasn't still hanging on to it when I got to my

room. So sorry." His glance went beyond Reggie. "Why, you are up, too, Monsieur. There must be a demon of wakefulness in the house to-night."

"When Sir Reginald cannot sleep he often calls me...my room is near his. Alas, he suffers from insomnia."

"That's tough.....for both of you. Well, good-night."

"Good-night. And thank you for bringing me the case."

After Clyde had gone, Reggie closed the door. "Now perhaps you'll believe my story. Here's the bracelet all right."

"All right, do you say! You fool, have you no brains...to stand there and say it is all right...when it is all so damnably wrong. A child of ten could have done the job better than you. Why did you not lock the door before opening the safe...to allow that man to see you there...with the case in your hand. Now he suspects everything."

"You're getting too jumpy.....of course he doesn't suspect. He seemed to think it quite natural that I should be in Uncle's study at that time in the morning...why, hang it all he came down there himself to get a book. Couldn't I be doing the same thing?"

"Knowing you, no one in their senses would expect you'd be there for that purpose. Whether he suspects or not I can't take the diamond up to London to be copied so long as he is in the house. He might keep quiet about the incident...again, he might speak of it to Mr. Jessel, who would of course immediately look in his safe for the bracelet...you would be linked up with the affair if the fake were discovered and....."

"My God, you're right. I...I. didn't think of that."

"You wouldn't."

Reggie winced at the contempt in Escande's voice. He was shaken by impotent rage to think he was so much in the power of this man whom he had grown to hate.

Escande picked up the leather case and flung it across to him.

"Take this and put it back again in the safe at once. You must get hold of it again after the American has left. Perhaps you'll show more sense next time."

Reggie took the case and returned to his Uncle's study. This time he was less fearful of discovery. His mind was filled with but one thought...his violent hatred of Escande and the determination that, at all costs, he would get out of his power.

CHAPTER XVIII

SALLY was disappointed in Clyde. That he should come down to Greystokes Priory and deliberately ingratiate himself with Mr. Jessel, in order to be invited to stay there, seemed to her a trifle despicable. If he had adopted this ruse to be near her, he did not avail himself of the opportunity for he spent most of his time with Mr. Jessel or Reggie.

He was mysterious, too. He had some secret from which she was excluded, and this piqued her. It made her distant with him. One morning when she was going to the South wing to take some flowers for the vacuees, she met him and was about to pass with merely a nod of recognition. He placed himself before her.

"Sally! Have I offended you?"

"Of course not."

"I don't believe that. All the jolly friendliness we once shared has vanished. What have I done?"

"It isn't anything you've done...I am to blame for imagining you to be something...you aren't."

He looked rueful. "I'm afraid I don't like that mark. Why not be frank with me?"

"How much longer are you staying down here?" he asked bluntly.

"I had intended to go tomorrow...but Mr. Jessel has just kindly asked me to extend my visit for another week at least...this English hospitality...it is wonderful."

Her lip curled. "So you've angled for another week...you might extend your stay indefinitely if you're clever enough."

An angry glint came into his eyes. She saw it and looked up hopefully. At last she had stung him into giving her some explanation of his conduct. "I have work to do here," he said slowly. "And when that is finished I shall go."

"Does Mr. Jessel know about this work?"

"Not yet. By the way, a friend of yours is coming down here to-day."

"A friend of mine?"

"Detective-Inspector Matthew Purcell."

"He's coming here again? Why is that?"

"You'd better ask him, honey. You may find him more communicative than I am."

Sally began to look troubled. "I've got a feeling that a catastrophe is about to happen...I don't like the atmosphere of Greystokes. It oppresses me. There is an indefinable undercurrent...I hardly know how to express it...but..." she shivered..."I long to get away from here."

"You are sensitive, Sally, and I think you ought to get away. What are Mrs. Brackenbury's plans?"

"She's in no hurry to leave. From hints she has dropped to me, I think she hopes to make a match of it with Mr. Jessel."

"I don't think she has a chance. He is wedded to...Greystokes Priory. It is his whole life...his one obsession..." A sudden recollection caused him to glance at his watch..."But I must go. I want to see him before Purcell arrives."

Although Jessel did not like to be disturbed when he was working on the history, he looked up eagerly when Clyde entered the room.

"Sit down, Mr. Moncrieff...I want to talk to you about these closing chapters. You don't mind sub-editing this new stuff? I cannot tell you how helpful it is to have a journalist to assist me. I'm sure you were right about my making some passages involved and...er...perhaps irrelevant."

Clyde laughed as he seated himself. "Those are only very minor alterations which I suggested, Mr. Jessel. The work as a whole is admirable. By the way, I was particularly interested in your reference to the Glastonbury diamond."

"Ah, yes...that is an interesting legend attached to it, I consider. It is a very beautiful stone...have you seen it?"

"No...I should like to do so."

Involuntarily, Clyde's glance turned to the pane which concealed the wall safe. Jessel rose, and slid back the panel.

"I keep it here...tradition insists that it should always remain at Greystokes Priory..."

"Or disaster will fall on the family...did you not mention that in your history?"

"Exactly."

As he opened the safe Clyde watched him with throbbing pulses. Would his ruse succeed? Several hours earlier Reggie had taken the case from the safe... had he had the good sense to return it? If not, there was trouble ahead for someone.

"Ah, here it is." Jessel had taken out the case, and snapped open the lid. "There, Mr. Moncrieff is our famous heirloom."

Clyde checked a sigh of relief. Thank God Reggie had done the right thing. He lifted out the bracelet and looked at it for some moments in silence. "I suppose it's worth a whole lot of money?" he said abruptly.

Jessel smiled gently. "Is not that an American trait, Mr. Moncrieff...to appraise a beautiful object according to its monetary value?"

Clyde shook his head. "We're not so hardboiled as that, Mr. Jessel. I was only thinking...it must be known by many people that you keep the diamond here...the safe seems to be one of the old-fashioned kind and has no combination. Might the jewel not be stolen?"

"I am not actually afraid of that. I am sure it is quite safe. Only Reggie knows that I keep it here."

"Then I suppose it is quite safe," said Clyde.

"Jessel did not observe his ironical expression. He replaced the case, remarking "That will be worn by the future Lady Jessel...Reggie's wife."

Before Clyde could reply there was a knock on the door. A servant entered.

"Mr. Purcell wishes to see you, sir."

Jessel raised his brows. "Mr. Purcell? Now I wonder...very well, Matthews, I'll see him at once." As he excused himself to Clyde, he added, "This man is from Scotland Yard..."

Clyde assumed an air of bland innocence. "Indeed. Any trouble about? It usually means that there is when detectives make a call."

"I don't quite know what he's after...He was here once before and I knew then what his object was for coming here. He would prefer that I don't mention it, I suppose, so you must forgive me if I say nothing more...The servants do not know that Mr. Purcell is a detective....But I must go now to see him...He's a very charming man, by the way....No doubt you'll meet him at lunch."

Clyde and the detective had planned to make the retence that they had not met before, and their manner

when they were presented to each other was formal. But as soon as they were alone, Purcell said in a low tone.

"I want to question that Frenchman without Mr. Jessel knowing it. He has such faith in the chap, I gather he might resent it..."

"He will be in Reggie's study after lunch. He and Reggie are supposed to be reading Moliere."

Purcell laughed. "Supposed to be reading eh?"

"That poor kid has learnt a lot from Escande...but it just isn't French literature, I guess."

"We'll interrupt the lesson. Have you anything to report?"

"I have. Early this morning I heard someone moving stealthily along the corridor. I looked out and saw Reggie going down the staircase with a torch in his hand. I followed. He went to Jessel's study, slid back a panel in the wall, opened the safe and took out a leather case. He looked pretty furtive about the job. This was the point where I decided to appear."

"Was that discreet?"

"Perhaps not. But I just spun a yarn about coming down for a book his uncle had lent me. And I had a plan. I chatted with him, asked him to get me a drink, and when he said he'd light me back to my room with his torch, I got a chance of taking the leather case from the pocket of his dressing-gown."

"Bit risky, wasn't it?"

"Not at all. I waited for a minute in my room and then crept back to the door of Reggie's study. I heard him talking to Escande. They were having a row about something...the Frenchman seemed beside himself with rage...I couldn't catch very clearly what they were saying. Then I knocked on the door...told a little tale about having picked the case up in the room downstairs,

apologised for having 'forgotten' to return it at once, and went away."

"I see your plan. You had established the fact that you had seen Reggie take the object from the safe ...that the Frenchman knew about it...and if it was anything he wanted to dispose of, you could point at once to the culprit."

"Yes, that was my idea."

"Not at all bad," said Purcell condescendingly.

"Thanks," said Clyde with mock humility. "Praise from such an astute detective as yourself means a whole lot to me."

Purcell chuckled. "All right. I asked for it. And now, have you got that ebony ruler with the initial scratched on it."

"Yes. Come to my room and you can examine it. Did you bring the knife?"

"Of course. For what reason do you think I came down here to-day?"

With a powerful magnifying glass the detective examined the markings on the ruler and then on the knife. There was a tense pause. Then he gave an exclamation.

"You were right! The initial on the knife corresponds with that on the ruler. What I took to be the letter 'F' is intended for 'E' that was not completed. The first and second horizontal strokes are identical on both objects. The top stroke juts beyond the downward stroke, the second doesn't join on to it...look for yourself...you'll see the same idiosyncrasies in the markings. Boy, I give you full marks for that discovery of yours...we'll make a full-blown detective of you yet."

"And what's the next move?"

"We're going to interview Escande."

Clyde grinned. "That'll interest me a lot."

"Come along, then. We must interrupt the boy's studies I'm afraid...did you say it was Moliere?"

When the two men entered Reggie's study, it was obvious that the discussion between the boy and his tutor was not on the subject of Moliere. They were scowling at each other, and it was evident from the tension in the air that they were on the edge of a quarrel.

Reggie sprang up from the deep chair in which he had been lolling. "Hello, Clyde...what about coming round to the stables with me, as you promised. I want to show you Firefly..."

"Some other time, Sir Reginald," Purcell interposed. "Just now Mr. Moncrieff and I want to have a private talk with Monsieur Escande."

"Private? What's in the air...oh, well, if I'm in the way..." He went up to the door. "I'm going down to the stables now...will you join me later, Clyde?"

"Sure I will."

After Reggie had gone out, Escande turned to Purcell with a frown. "I cannot possibly see why you should want to have a private talk with me...I scarcely know you."

"We shall soon get to know each other better, Monsieur. Perhaps you are not aware that I am a detective."

"Indeed? A most interesting profession I always consider." The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders indifferently, but Clyde had observed the fear that had flashed into his narrow eyes.

"It is interesting, as you say...particularly when we get on the right trail. Look at this. Have you seen it before?" As he spoke he held out the knife which he had taken from his pocket.

"Why, yes, it's.....I mean...why, it's only an ordinary clasp knife is it?"

"Have you seen it before?" repeated the detective.

"The Frenchman took the knife and turned it over.

"It certainly resembles one I lost sometime ago."

"That you lost, eh?"

"Eh bien, is there anything extraordinary about that? One can lose one's belongings too frequently... especially an object like this."

"You didn't lose it in Rio, by any chance?"

There was a long pause. Then Escande repeated in a changed voice. "Rio?"

"Yes. That's where it was...found?"

"How was it found there?"

"Between the ribs of an Englishman who was murdered in an opium den...Does that surprise you, Monsieur."

The Frenchman sprang to his feet. "Mon dieu, c'est affreux! You cannot mean that this knife of mine killed a man...that...that... you suspect me of murder?"

"You were in Rio on the night Howarth Ripley was killed."

"I do not know this man...I swear to you that I never met him..."

"Perhaps you will also say that you never met his mistress, Cara Matteos."

"Why should I say what is not true? I first met Cara in South America some years ago."

"And when you were in Rio you met again."

"Parfaitement."

"Yet you say you never met Howarth Ripley... come, Monsieur, endeavour to refresh your memory. In appearance Ripley was extremely like Sir Reginald... older of course... but the same red hair, the same features, the same tall figure....."

"You mean...that he belonged to the Jessel family?"

"You should know that."

"I did not know it. Nom de dieu, it is the truth."

"Then how does it happen that this knife of yours——"

"Will you not believe me when I tell you that I lost it.....that I will swear to you on the grave of my dead mother."

"But how did you lose it?"

"I cannot say exactement. I may have lent it... Reggie takes my things as if they were his own. At times it is ennuyant..."

"Sir Reginald...you think he borrowed this knife?"

"He may have done...then later lost it himself... how can I tell... unless..." he pulled himself up with a jerk.

Purcell was watching him closely. "I believe a solution just presented itself to you. If you want to clear yourself, monsieur, you will tell me everything."

"I have told you all I can."

"Which amounts to nothing...You are holding something back."

A change had come over the Frenchman's face. His eyes were glittering with excitement, he paced the room.

"You are right...an idea did occur to me. Now, you must believe me when I tell you that I know nothing of the murder. But I do believe I can help you. There is something I wish to work out...it is like a what do you call it...a...ah yes, a jigsaw puzzle with a piece that is missing."

"And you think you can find the missing piece?"

"If you will give me but a little time."

"I have to tell you that you are under observation Monsieur."

"I am entirely at your disposition." The Frenchman gave Purcell a stiff little bow. "And I believe it will not be long before you find that you have made a very great mistake."

Clyde observed that Purcell was looking less confident. When they were alone he asked.

"Are you going to arrest Escande on suspicion?"

"No. I'm going on a different line."

"You think he is innocent?"

Purcell did not reply for some moments. Then he said slowly, "Escande didn't do the murder.....but I believe he knows who did."

CHAPTER XIX

YOUNG Sammy Cotton enjoyed the life of an evacuee at Greystokes Priory—but there were drawbacks. So many places in the grounds were “out of bounds”. He and his chum, Fred, accustomed to a playground of the East End streets, were irked at these restrictions. They were enterprising urchins, and it was not surprising that one afternoon they might have been seen setting out furtively for a swiftly rushing stream in the restricted area, where they mistakenly hoped they might fish for tiddlers.

“I didn’t let Mum see the jar...or she’d ’ave been on to me wantin’ to know where I was goin’,” said Fred.

“Not ’arf she wouldn’t,” agreed Sam. “Bloomin’ shime, aint it, a cove carn’t go where ’e wants in this plice...with nothink but miles o’ fields an’ woods with no one in ’em.”

“Look out there’s one of the gardener blokes comin’ this way...wot abart ’idin’ in that bit o’ wood over there.”

The two boys entered a small spinney where they concealed themselves for a time.

“The toff never sed nothink abart us keepin’ away from this plice,” said Sam. “We could play ’untin the spy ’ere fine. Wot abart it?”

They explored the spinney eagerly. A narrow path ran between the trees. It was a splendid place for their war game; there were many evergreen bushes for “cover.”

Suddenly Sam started back in alarm. “Say, Fred, we’re being watched...there’s a bloke lying over there near that bush.”

"Lyin, did yer sye? Garn! Aint the ground orl soppo."

"Look fer yerself then."

They approached the spot indicated by Sam very cautiously. They saw the feet of a man protruding from the bush.

"Coo...you were right, Sam..." They drew closer. "It's a bloke. Wot's 'e doin' 'ere d'ye think?"

The man was lying on his side motionless. "I got it," declared Fred, to whom the sight of a man helpless and prostrate was not a novel one. "'E's a drunk."

But Sam's thin shrewd little face looked thoughtful. "Nah. 'E aint a drunk, Fred." He bent over the silent figure and then started back. "Lumme! 'E's been knifed!"

They stared at each other in terror. Then, with one accord, they dashed out of the spinney as quickly as their young legs would carry them.

Shortly afterwards a band of excited children from the South wing were seen careering in the direction of the spinney. They were soon followed by alarmed and angry mothers calling to them shrilly.

"Come back 'ere, young Ned or I'll 'ave the skin orf yer backside"....."Don't you go there, 'Arry, or I'll warm yer..." "Sam! Bring our Liza back 'ere strite away....."

The excitement brought gardeners to the spot followed by Soames, the butler. They cleared the children out of the spinney.

"Is it true what they say...that there's a dead man ere?" asked the butler.

One of the under-gardeners came up. "It is true, Mr. Soames...he's got a knife in 'is ribs..."

"Good Lord! A murder...on private property, too!" Soames was more indignant than shocked. There

had been trouble enough with trespassers before, he reflected. It had reached a pretty pass when one of them came here to do a murder. Such a scandal...the police.....detectives.....stories in the newspapers. Mr. Jessel would be most upset at such publicity. It wasn't nice. "Where is the...er...body?" he asked loftily.

"Over there...by that bush...it's the Frenchman... Sir Reginald's tutor."

Soames' affronted air vanished. He turned pale... "I didn't think it was someone from the house...it's a terrible thing...you're sure he's dead..."

"He's been dead for nearly a couple of hours, I'd say..." Shall we take him up to the house."

"No. If he's gone there's nothing we can do... and in a case of murder the police don't like the body to be moved...that much I do know...I'll 'phone the police right away."

Soames returned to the house much quicker than he had left it. As he entered Clyde was crossing the hall.

He was naturally astonished to see the usually calm and dignified Soames running towards him panting, his florid face pale...

"Soames! What the...I say, have you just run into the family ghost?"

Soames gasped out his story. "I don't know how to tell Mr. Jessel, sir...It's going to be no end of a shock to him."

"I'll break the news to Mr. Jessel if you like. You must phone at once for the police...then I want to put a call through to London....."

"Very good, Sir."

Clyde hurried to Mr. Jessel's study, and, as he expected, found him engrossed in writing, an old

leather bound volume open at his side. He looked up benignly.

"Ah, Mr. Moncrieff wanted to speak to you..." he broke off. "Is anything wrong? You seem agitated."

"I'm sorry to bring bad news...you must prepare yourself for a shock——"

"It isn't Reggie... don't tell me anything has happened to him...an accident..." Jessel pushed aside his papers and jumped to his feet.

"I think he's all right. It's Monsieur Escande..."

Jessel interpreted the gravity in Clyde's face. You mean he's—?"

"Dead. Yes. He's been found in the spinney... murdered."

"My God...." Jessel seemed stunned at the news. He swayed then sat down suddenly in his seat..."The police must be sent for..."

"Soames is telephoning the local police now. But I think Scotland Yard should be informed also immediately. With your permission, I'll get through to Purcell."

"Of course, of course...do what you think best. How glad I am that you are here...you seem to know how to act in an emergency...Forgive me if I seem over-come...poor Escande...I must admit I never could bring myself to like the chap...now I feel remorseful that I ever harboured unkind thoughts about him...Murdered...it's horrible. He seemed a quite living sort...not the kind to have a secret enemy...that reminds me..." He raised his head suddenly..."I saw a man loafing in the vicinity of the lodge gates when I went out yesterday afternoon. I noticed him particularly——"

"He was a stranger to the district?"

ark swarthy type, rather flashily dressed."

"Did he look like a foreigner?"

"I'm not prepared to say...but I didn't like the look of him, or the furtive way he hung about...he made off when he saw me."

"That's an important point. The police will make enquiries. Will you come down with me now to the spinney to look at the body?"

Jessel had a movement of recoil. "I...I...would rather not. Unless, of course, you think it necessary?"

"It isn't. Soames said two of the gardeners are on guard there until the police arrive——"

"What about Reggie? Has he been told?" interrupted Jessel quickly.

"I don't know. Where is he? Hadn't you better break the news to him at once?"

"I don't know how this will affect him...he's very highly strung you know...And he was most attached to his tutor..."

"It's come as a shock to all of us...I think he will stand up to it all right."

"Then will you tell him of the tragedy, Mr. Moncrieff? I...I...hardly feel in a condition myself to touch upon the subject."

Clyde could not repress a movement of impatience. He always despised a man who fell down in a crisis... Jessel, absorbed in his books and the writing of his history was a dreamer, he decided, and very little else.

"Just as you wish, Mr. Jessel. I think you ought to have a drink....it would pull you together."

"You're quite right...I do feel in need of a stimulant. You'll join me, won't you?"

"No, thanks. I must put through that call to London at once. Excuse me." As he hurried out he encountered Soames.

"The police are coming over at once, sir. They say nothing must be touched until they arrive."

"Will you put through a trunk call to London... Whitehall 1212?"

"Very good, sir."

As Soames moved away, Clyde enquired, "Where is Sir Reginald?"

"I haven't seen him sir, since he went out after lunch. He was with...why, sir, he and the...dear—er...er Monsieur went out together."

The two men stood staring at each other for a moment in silence.

"They went out together?" echoed Clyde.

"They often went for a walk after lunch if the weather was fine, before beginning the afternoon studies."

"Did you see Sir Reginald return?"

"No, sir."

Clyde looked thoughtful. Then in casual tones he remarked, "Let me know as soon as he comes in. Mr. Jessel wants me to speak to him...But we're wasting time...I want that call put through."

"Yes, sir." Soames stood hesitating for a moment, however. "Excuse me asking you, but if the police question me should I mention that I saw the two go out together?"

"Why not?"

"They might start questioning Sir Reginald. You know how the police twist and turn things about. And then if they get it out of me that I heard them quarrelling to-day..."

"You heard them quarrelling?"

"Yes, sir. It was after Monsieur Escande had received a phone call from London. He went up to Sir Reginald's study...I was passing and I heard them having high words...er...very high words, sir."

"Perhaps the tutor was only reprimanding Sir Reginald..."

"It wasn't anything like that. I distinctly heard Sir Reginald say, 'You can go to hell where you belong...'"

At any other time the sight of the dignified Soames pompously repeating this phrase would have amused Clyde. Now he looked grave and troubled.

"You're quite sure of this? Was the door closed?"

"It was, sir."

"Then how could you have heard the actual words... unless you put your ear to the keyhole?"

Soames looked offended. "It is not my habit to listen at doors. The voices of the two gentlemen were raised...I could scarcely help hearing."

"Well, all this may have no bearing on the case. But you must tell the police everything you know."

"Very good, sir."

After Clyde had had a brief talk with Purcell, telling him that Jessel wished him to take up the case, he hurried down to the spinney. He noted, with disquiet, the trampled state of the ground around the body. The crowd that had rushed to the scene after the first alarm had done much to obliterate the footprints that might have been a valuable clue to the murder.

He bent over the dead man and examined him. A knife had been thrust between his ribs in the region of the heart. There flashed before Clyde the most poignant memory of his life...that of the opium den in Rio when the Englishman had been stabbed before his eyes. The Frenchman had met his death in the same manner... perhaps by the same hand.

CHAPTER XX

"DO you think this murder is likely to resolve itself into one of those unsolved mysteries, Mr. Purcell?" enquired Jessel.

He was sitting in the library with the detective and Clyde following the inquest which had been adjourned.

Purcell looked up from his notebook. "Not if I can help it." His manner was slightly taciturn.

"You have clues, then?"

"In some ways perhaps rather too many. And you must forgive me if I say I cannot discuss clues at this point of the proceedings. The affair might have been solved almost easily if that crowd could have been kept off when the body was discovered...the ground was soft in the spinney...and valuable footprints were obliterated."

Jessel evidently felt that he was being reproved. "All this occurred before I even knew of the tragedy... Otherwise we acted as promptly as possible." He passed his hand across his brow. "What I have heard today has been as great a shock to me as the murder... to know that Escande was leading a double life... teaching Reggie to drink and gamble. And I have been so careful about his upbringing."

"How did you come to engage this man as tutor?"

"Through a West End scholastic agency...most reputable. One that had supplied the boy's former tutors. Escande came to me with the highest references, too—"

"Then you're not a detective?"

"No...but I have a very real interest in seeing that murderer tracked down. That's all Mr. Purcell will want me to say at the moment."

"Then if I can be of no more use, perhaps you will excuse me, gentlemen? The inquest...the horrible publicity of this affair has been a great strain to me."

"I'm afraid I must ask you further questions, Mr. Jessel...your help on some points would be invaluable. In the meantime could you send for Sir Reginald? I want to question him?"

"If you think it is necessary." He rose and touched the bell, the look of anxiety deepening on his brow. "But Reggie is at all times a little...er...unbalanced. He has been very distraught since the tragedy."

"I'll handle him as gently as possible, you may be sure. About this stranger you saw on the day of the murder. Where did you first come across him?"

"He was near the lodge gates."

"Had he been at the lodge, do you think?"

"I couldn't say anything about that."

"What made you notice him particularly? There are many strangers in the vicinity now that so many evacuees have been sent to these parts."

Jessel nodded thoughtfully. "It was his appearance, I think...And a sort of slinking manner...I just didn't like the look of him."

"How long has the lodge-keeper been in your employ?"

"You mean Stacey? He's only been here about a year...he replaced old Carter whose family has worked for us for generations...Ben Carter was the last...one of the old school...a devoted servant..."

"Exactly," broke in Purcell looking impatient. He had no time to waste on side issues. "It isn't this Carter I want information about, Mr. Jessel...but Stacey. Where did he come from?"

"He doesn't belong to the village. He's a Londoner. He used to be a servant of a friend of mine, Lord Furston. When Lord Furston went to live abroad he asked me if I could find Stacey a job...old Carter had just died, so I gave him the post as lodge keeper."

"How has he behaved since he came here?"

Jessel hesitated for a moment. Then he replied, "He has always carried out his duties satisfactorily."

At that moment the butler entered. "You rang, sir?"

"Yes, Soames. Please tell Sir Reginald to come here."

The butler turned to go but not before Purcell had observed an anxious look pass between him and Jessel. Evidently they were troubled at the idea of Reggie being questioned by the detective. Clyde too, observed Soames' apprehensive look, and recalled his remark when the murder was first discovered—"If the police question me should I mention that I saw the two go out together".....the two meaning Escande and Reggie. Clyde had already mentioned that point to Purcell.

Reggie came into the library looking hostile. The recent disturbing events had obviously left their mark on him. His face was unusually pale, his hands were trembling, and a slight twitching of the muscles on the left side of his face revealed his nervous condition.

"What's this? Another enquiry?" he asked impatiently as he glanced round the table.

Jessel threw him an imploring look. "Now, Reggie, you'll give what help you can, I'm sure....."

"Why should I? What's it got to do with me. I'm sick of being questioned as if I were a criminal."

"I'm very sorry if you have to be inconvenienced, Sir Reginald," said Purcell soothingly. "But I'm sure you are as anxious as we are that this matter should be cleared up."

"I don't care...Raoul's dead isn't he...enquiries won't bring him back again. Yes, he's dead and I'm glad of it...I hated him.." his voice rose shrilly.. "hated him."

"Reggie...do think what you're saying." Jessel had risen, obviously distressed. All this is not going to help you."

"Help me? What do you mean?"

"It might be thought that——"

"Don't let this worry you, Mr. Jessel," broke in Purcell..."I can understand that Sir Reginald does not feel inclined to discuss this unhappy affair." He turned to Reggie. "There are one or two points I should like to clear up. What you can tell me is of importance because you were the last to see Escande alive."

"That's not true...I'm not here to answer lies, am I? Are you insinuating that I murdered him?"

"What makes you think that?"

"Because the last one to see him alive must have been the man who murdered him."

"Of course. I should have said that you were the last one in his company before he met his assailant."

"I don't agree. He might have met several people after I left him."

"You went out together after lunch, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"You intended going for your usual walk, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Then why did you part company?"

"We had words," said Reggie sullenly.

"Why were you quarrelling?"

"Mind your own damned business."

"This is my business, Sir Reginald. Believe me, it will be so much better for you if you will try to answer my questions quietly."

"It was about some money he'd borrowed on my account...you know about that already. And there was something else——" he hesitated.

"What was the other thing?"

"He wanted me to hand over £20 of my allowance...as if I get enough to fling about..."

"Why should he want you to give him that money?"

"It wasn't for himself, he said, but for Stacey."

"The lodge keeper?"

"There's no other Stacey on the place that I know of."

"Have you any idea why he should want to give the money to this man?"

Reggie looked reluctant to reply. "Hadn't you better ask Stacey yourself?"

"I shall question him later. But I should like to hear your version first."

"We had to get Stacey on our side. When Raoul and I went up to town at night we always left the car at the lodge beforehand. We should have been heard if we'd taken it out of the garage. That gave Stacey a bit of a hold over us. We had to give him a sweetener now and again. But £20 seemed to be absurd. I told Raoul so. I admit I flared up at first...I'd got the idea that he wanted money for himself, that he meant to go shares with Stacey."

"Was it during your walk with your tutor that this question first arose?"

"Yes. Raoul said we might drop in at the lodge and tell Stacey he could expect the money. That's where I jibbed."

"Then after having words you left Escande?"

"Yes. I went on in the direction of the village alone."

"Did Escande go to the lodge?"

Reggie meditated a moment. "I rather believe he walked in an opposite direction. I was feeling pretty angry at the moment and took little further notice of him."

"This stranger that Mr. Jessel said he saw lurking in the vicinity of the lodge...did you catch sight of him when you were going or returning from the village?"

"No."

"Thank you very much, Sir Reginald. There's just one question more I should like to put to you." From a black leather portfolio on the table he took a knife. Clyde recognised it as the one Purcell had brought from Rio. "Do you recognise this?"

Reggie picked up the knife and turned it over. "Yes. It belonged to Raoul....."

"Did you at any time borrow it?"

"I might have...look here what are you getting at? Now I come to think of it I can't swear that I have seen that knife before. It's quite ordinary except for the large blade. You're not going to make me swear—"

"Of course not." Purcell's voice was soothing, his manner urbane. "I have no more questions to ask you, Sir Reginald."

"Then you don't think it's anyone in the vicinity of Greystokes..." In his glance she believed she read the thought that was haunting him. He was worried about Reggie...the fact that he had been in the company of Escande shortly before he was murdered...that the older man had some sinister influence over the boy whose unstable temperament might drive him to desperate deeds.

"Of course it couldn't possibly be anyone in the vicinity." She spoke with such heartiness and confidence that the troubled frown lifted from his brow. He looked considerably less reassured after the scene with Purcell in the library, the following day. The detective, having concluded his examination of Reggie, mentioned that he was going down to the lodge to have an interview with Stacey. Jessel, obviously relieved that his offer to accompany him was refused, sought out Mrs. Brackenbury.

"Has anything else unpleasant happened?" she asked, looking at his harassed expression.

"Yes. What I most feared. Believe me, I feel almost distracted.... I must confide in you..." He paused for a moment and passed his hand across his forehead. "The detective has been questioning Reggie."

"But what of that...haven't we all been questioned?"

"Yes but not in the same way. It's my belief," he lowered his voice, "that he suspects Reggie."

"Detectives suspect everybody...It's their job. He probably began by suspecting me. I wish you wouldn't allow yourself to get so distressed."

He sighed. "There are so many other things, that have come to light. I have been basely deceived by Reggie...Escande who falsely pretended he had the boy's welfare at heart...Then Stacey... he was in it, too. People I trusted. I shouldn't be suprised to find that Soames, who was in the family when I was a boy, is also working against me in some way. I was glad

when Purcell excused me from going down to the lodge for the interview with Stacey. I didn't want to hear any more tales of treachery."

The detective and Clyde, on their way at that moment to the lodge, were also discussing the interview with Reggie.

"The boy knows something he won't tell us," said Purcell. "But I haven't finished with him yet. He's a nervous emotional type...he'll give himself away eventually."

"You think he's implicated in the murder?"

"I do."

"In that case he is also implicated in the crime in Rio?"

"That's one of the things that floors me. I don't mind admitting I'm up against one of the toughest problems I've ever had to consider. On the journey from Buenos Aires the "Montania" was in Rio harbour for three days. During that time, Jessel has already assured me that the whole party remained on board in the evenings. They visited the town for a few hours during the day only. About Escande he could say nothing definite. It was the boy's habit to retire early after dinner——"

"So he gave out. He probably went ashore secretly with Escande."

"That thought certainly occurred to me. I'm going to question Reggie later about that...when his uncle is not present."

"That should be best. Reggie hates his uncle, you know. A complex character."

"I don't know why he should hate him." Purcell took a cigarette, a thoughtful look on his face. "The old chap has done his best for the young scamp. And it's plain to see that he's very deeply concerned about him."

"I noticed that particularly when you were questioning Reggie so closely. He seemed worried lest he should give himself away too much."

"What worries me most at the moment is what the attacker did with the knife after stabbing Escande. The local police have made a pretty exhaustive search of the spinney and the fields beyond. I think I'll go on to the local police headquarters after seeing Stacey. Inspector Ford seems a smart chap. He's working out a theory of his own at the moment—and I'm encouraging him in it."

"If he gets on the right track won't that be rather stealing your thunder?"

"You surely don't think I'd let professional jealousy stand in the way of tracking down a criminal. Besides," he chuckled, "I don't think Ford's theory is the right one...but it's damned ingenious."

"I have a theory, too," said Clyde modestly.

"What...a new one?"

"I suppose I might call it new...it only occurred to me yesterday?"

"Might I ask what it is?"

"Until I've worked out certain details you might think it...a little, shall I say fantastic?"

"So you won't spill the beans, eh? Quite right. Cheek of me to want to butt in on your ideas."

"We're both working for the same ends, Purcell. But with me, it's more of a personal matter. I want to get that guy who tried to put the job on me in Rio that night. That's a score I mean to pay off, and I'll do it, if it takes me half my life."

They had now arrived at the lodge. The moment they knocked the door was opened by Stacey. He was a small man with an ingratiating manner. Recog-

nising them, he flung the door wide and stood aside for them to enter.

"Come in, gentlemen. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Just answer a few questions," replied the detective briefly.

Stacey led them to a small sitting room on the right of the passage, and asked them to sit down.

"If I can be of any help, sir, in the matter I shall be very glad. A terrible thing to happen...if only it had taken place off the estate...but so distressing for the family. It's the sort of thing they're not used to, sir, and—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Purcell. "Let's get down to business. You knew this man, Escande well?"

"Not exactly what you'd call well, sir...It isn't my place to know a gentleman in his position well. The ladies and gentlemen from the house, they drop me an affable word when they see me at the gates, and—"

Purcell again interrupted his flow of words. "That's enough of that kind of talk, Stacey. You were in league with the Frenchman. You knew that he was playing a dirty game in taking Sir Reginald up to town at night to frequent gambling houses. You assisted him to deceive Mr. Jessel."

"Why, sir, put like that it doesn't sound very nice."

"There isn't anything nice about this business."

"I swear to you, sir, I didn't know what the Frenchman's game was. All he told me was that Sir Reginald was being kept under by his uncle, and like most young gentlemen, wanted a bit of a fling. Why, sir, I was young myself once, and I——"

"Get on with the story."

"So I agreed to them keeping the car at the lodge on the nights they wanted to go out. There didn't seem any great harm in that."

"Especially when they made it worth your while, eh?"

"I never asked for anything...never expected a farthing...I'd have done it for Sir Reginald. A nice openhanded young gentleman. I always liked him."

"And disliked Mr. Jessel, I take it?"

"Why should I do that, sir?"

"I'm putting questions. You answer them. You have a grudge against Mr. Jessel?"

"Well I...er...yes, sir."

"What about?"

"For one thing, it's a crying shame the way he kept Sir Reginald under. Always got his eye on him."

"That's nothing to do with you."

"No, sir."

"What's the real reason?"

For the first time Stacey looked embarrassed. "Well, sir, he got to know of an unfortunate little affair that happened to me before I went into Lord Furston's service. I did a stretch.....I mean, I was convicted...unjustly—"

"Of course," broke in Purcell drily.

"But a chap can't live a thing like that down if he knows that his employer doesn't trust him. Mr. Jessel wouldn't give me a job up at the house...thought I wasn't honest enough, I suppose...wonder he isn't afraid I'll make off with the gates."

"As it happens you're absolutely wrong about Mr. Jessel. He is the sort who would always give a man another chance. He is far too kind and easy-going.

And when we questioned him about you he did not make any reference to this conviction you speak of. He ought to have given me all the facts, but evidently wished to spare you. Now, about this stranger Mr. Jessel saw near the lodge gates on the day of the tragedy. Did you see him?"

"That I didn't, sir."

"You seem very positive. Have you spoken to anyone else who saw the man?"

"No, sir. Seems like as if Mr. Jessel imagined him."

"I don't think that's likely." Purcell referred to his notes. Did you see Sir Reginald pass the lodge on his way to the village about 1.45, that same day?"

"I didn't see him, sir."

"Yet he declares that he passed the lodge at that hour. When was the last time you saw Monsieur Escande?"

"The night before he was done in, sir. He came down here about his letters—" Stacey paused abruptly, as if aware that he had made a slip.

"Letters, eh?"

"Why, sir, perhaps I shouldn't have mentioned it..."

"Things might be very awkward for you if you don't mention all you know, Stacey. So he used your address for his correspondence."

"Not all of it, sir."

"I assume that. From where did this correspondence come? Abroad?"

"Yes. There were usually foreign postage stamps."

"Had you any letters for him when he called here last?"

"One. And it seemed to upset him a bit. That had the London postmark. It was typed."

"What was it about?"

Stacey stared uncomprehending. "I don't understand, sir?"

"You never steamed open any of his letters, I suppose? There, Stacey don't look so wounded. I shan't bring it up against you. If you give a hand in bringing the murderer to justice, there'll be a reward. Who did the letter come from?"

"I swear I didn't steam it open, sir. The flap had come ungunmed and..." he caught Purcell's eye. "It was from Solomon Beron and was about some money that had been loaned. He was pressing him for it."

"That's quite right. We found that letter amongst Escande's papers. It helped us on another line of enquiry we were making." He got up. "That will do for the moment, but I may want to come in and see you later. And, remember, if any letters come for Escande, you must keep them for me."

"Very good, sir."

After Clyde and Purcell had left the lodge, Purcell remarked, "Stacey's slippery type. But we might find him useful." He glanced at his wrist watch. "Now, I'm going down to police headquarters to see Inspector Ford. Are you coming along?"

"I think not. There's something I have to look up...See you later."

After seeing the detective on his way to the village, Clyde took a devious route to the lodge going round the back of the building, which was square, one-storeyed and consisted of three rooms and a kitchen. Clyde peered cautiously into each window. There was one small window opening from a scullery. Beneath this was a water butt covered with a wooden lid. Clyde scrambled on to this. He now had a full view of the

erior of the scullery. A man was there whose appearance bore no resemblance to that of the lodge-keeper. He was dark and swarthy looking.

"I didn't waste my time while Purcell was questioning Stacey," thought Clyde with satisfaction. "Just I thought...the guy hiding there is the stranger Jessel hanging about the lodge on the day of the murder!"

CHAPTER XXII

SALLY had not borne the tragedy at Greystokes with the same equanimity as did Mrs. Brackenbury. Although she had courage, she was highly strung and sensitive to atmosphere. She wished to leave the place and was dismayed when her employer mentioned that their visit was to be indefinitely postponed.

"Mr. Jessel is most anxious for me to remain," she said preening herself.

"I'm afraid I cannot do so," declared Sally firmly. "I am so sorry if I should inconvenience you, Mrs. Brackenbury—"

"What...you mean you want to leave me?"

"I want to do some war work, you know. I shall join one of the women's services. I was only waiting until we returned to London...I...I...hope you understand."

"I understand that you're being very selfish...to leave me here where I shall have difficulty in replacing you..."

"But I am not leaving you without notice...you will have time to get someone in my place."

"It's not going to be easy."

Sally was silent thinking that Mrs. Brackenbury was, perhaps, not going to find her world so easy in the future. She might not be so rich. She might not feed so well. She might, indeed, even be set to work. Sally listened meekly to her employer's many reproaches and made her escape as soon as possible. As she crossed

the hall Clyde was coming in. He was looking extremely pleased about something. He greeted her cheerily.

"Hello, Sally. First time I've seen you alone for days. Say, come into this room, will you...there's something I want to tell you."

As he spoke he took her by the arm and led her into the morning room, which opened off the hall.

Sally seated herself, feeling self-conscious. She anticipated what he was going to tell her, and the thought sent the colour to her cheeks, and caused her pulses to flutter. She looked up at him shyly. "Is what you have to tell me very important?"

"Indeed it is," he said eagerly. "Sally——"

"Yes, Clyde? Her voice was tender.

"I'm certain I've got a first-rate clue as to who did that murder."

His words had an instant effect on her. The soft light died out of her eyes, she looked extremely indignant.

"The murder!" she echoed.

"Yes...and I'm willing to bet a hundred dollars that it's quite escaped our friend Purcell."

Sally thought of a conversation she had had the previous day with Purcell but it had in no way related to the murder. He had asked her to be his wife and—because of Clyde—she had refused. Perhaps she'd been mistaken about Clyde...perhaps his manner towards her had just been the jolly, friendly, free and easy attitude that distinguished the American character. She got up stiffly.

"Do you think it quite safe to trust me with such an important matter?" she asked. "They say women can't keep a secret."

"But I'd trust you with anything. You're ^{so} sensible."

A girl hates to be told that she is sensible. Sally's sense of grievance deepened. "That's very nice of you. But I'd like you to know that I've been very much affected by this dreadful tragedy...I can't sleep...I sha'n't rest until I get away from this place. I'm flattered at your wanting to confide in me...but the last thing in the world I want to discuss is murder." She went out in a flutter of indignation. Clyde stared at the closed door in perplexity.

"Darned if I know why she should get so sore at me," he thought gloomily. "I suppose she thinks I'm dumb...and she never gave me a chance to tell her of the smart work I've put in to-day."

But if Sally had proved unsympathetic, Purcell was greatly impressed by Clyde's discovery at the lodge.

"I thought Stacey had something up his sleeve. But what made you think he was concealing someone at the lodge?"

"When you were talking to him I was looking round...making mental notes. You'd told me previously that Stacey lived at the lodge alone. There were two glasses standing on that sideboard affair in the room he took us into...they'd contained beer and hadn't been washed up. Of course a friend might have dropped in...but a friend wouldn't leave his shoes behind...They were just inside the wall cupboard the door of which was partly opened...they were at least two sizes too small for Stacey, and were of a type a foreigner would wear. Stacey's manner, too, when you were questioning him, looked suspicious. He glanced sharply over his shoulder once or twice and seemed at times in an uneasy listening attitude...I wasn't a stowaway for nothing...I know that feeling of someone going to jump out at you.

"So, without saying a word to me, you went back to the lodge and did a spot of sleuthing on your own

account. Smart work. Think I'll go down to the police station right away...we'll have the lodge surrounded and get our man——"

"No. I think that isn't the best way," broke in Clyde. "It makes the whole thing too public. You and I will go down to the lodge...we shall get our man, you'll see with less fuss, and we may get just the information we want. As a precaution, we'll take our revolvers with us."

Stacey may have been surprised to see them return again so quickly. This time he admitted them with a manner less ingratiating than before.

"You've come again to question me, gentlemen? he demanded curtly. "I told you before all I know."

"You were very helpful," agreed Purcell. "It isn't you I want to question this time—but your friend?"

"I don't understand, sir."

"I want to talk to your friend who is staying with you here."

"I'm alone in the place sir...there's no one here... give you my word." ...As he spoke he tried to make a sudden dash past them. Purcell caught him by the arm.

"Cover him, Moncrieff, while I search the place."

"D-don't shoot," stammered Stacey, trembling at the sight of Clyde's revolver..."I'll tell you everything... the chap's hiding in the pantry that opens off the scullery...but he's done no harm...neither have I...he's only dodging some one he owes money to"...he broke off as Purcell entered. The man Clyde had seen through the scullery window was marching before the detective at the point of the revolver.

"Sit down," ordered Purcell. "And tell me what you are doing here."

"I'm doing no harm," said the man sullenly. "Only staying for a day or two here."

Yet Stacey previously said that there was no one else here but himself. "Purcell considered him thoughtfully. He had a swarthy look, and spoke English with the slightly lisping accent and lilting intonation that distinguishes the half caste. "What's your name?"

"Josef Matteos."

Clyde glanced quickly at Purcell. But if the detective was surprised at this announcement, his face did not reveal it.

"You have a relative, Matteos, called Cara who lives in Rio?"

"Yes. Cara Matteos is my sister."

"You are a native of South America?"

"Exactly."

"What is your business in this country?"

"I came on a visit."

"Cut that out. Why are you here?"

"I came especially to see Raoul Escande. I had a message for him...from my sister who knew him well."

"It must have been a fairly important message to bring you all this way."

"It was...very important. But now, of course it has no significance."

"You're wrong. I think I shall find it of great significance. What was it about."

Matteos drew himself up with dignity. "Pardon...but it is purely a private matter."

"Listen, Matteos. This attitude won't help you at all. You were seen hanging about this place on the

lay Escande was murdered. Ever since then you have been hiding here."

"I had no intention of hiding. It was Stacey, here, who said it would be better for me to lie low until the enquiries in this district had ended. I know nothing of the murder. I had no grudge against Escande. I have a letter from my sister to him...a letter that she did not wish to pass through the censor's hands."

"You have the letter with you?"

Matteos touched his breast pocket. "It is here."

"Let me see it."

Matteos shrugged his shoulders. "Pardon me. You are not very discreet. It is my sister's affair."

"Mine as well now. Hand over that letter."

At the detective's brusque manner, Matteos shrugged his shoulders again, but took a sealed envelope from his pocket and passed it over in silence.

Purcell tore open the envelope, drew out a sheet of notepaper and studied it with brows drawn together.

"It's written in French, I see."

"Why not, since Escande was a Frenchman."

Clyde observed a faint smile of derision on the face of Matteos. Purcell may have been a very good detective but he was a poor linguist. Though able to distinguish one or two phrases, he could not make a perfect translation of the letter.

"So she knows the name of the assassin," he muttered. Then he turned to Clyde. "What do you make of this Moncrieff?"

Clyde studied the thin sloping handwriting and as he read his heart leapt as he realised the significance of his message which ran:

Cher ami : Je connais le nom de l'assassin. Il est celui qui vous avez désigné J.2x. Voici le moment de vous en profiter. N'oubliez que la moitié de butin est à moi. Cara.

"This is very important," he began...

"What is the exact translation ?" asked Purcell.

Just this : "Dear Friend, I know the name of the murderer. He is the one you have designated J.2x. It is the right time for you to profit by this. Don't forget that half of the spoils come to me. Cara."

There was an impressive silence. Then Purcell turned to Matteos. "So you think this is no one's affair but your sister's. Who is J.2x ?"

"On my sacred oath, I cannot tell you. I am but an emissary...I did not know the contents of the letter I swear to you I know nothing."

So emphatic was his manner Purcell felt inclined to believe him on this point. He rose.

"I shall want to put some other questions to you later. In the meantime, make no attempt to leave here. If you do, you will be arrested. I am having both you and Stacey watched."

As he and Clyde left the lodge, he remarked, "I shall send a cable to police headquarters in Rio telling them to re-arrest Cara Matteos. In the meantime I shall continue my investigation on the lines I had in mind before I saw that letter."

"So some poor devil was to be blackmailed," remarked Clyde. "A foul type that Escande."

"And to be selected as tutor to a weak impressionable youth like Reggie! By the way, I want you to do me a favour. Get Reggie out of the way for an hour if you can."

"All right. I'll ask him to take me for a run in his car...bit of a risk considering the way he drives, but I'd do anything for a pal. What's the idea?"

"I want to search his rooms. You understand?"

Clyde nodded. "I understand. You can reckon on me to keep him out of the way."

CHAPTER XXIII

"YOU searched Reggie's rooms, I suppose? Any results?" Noting the gravity of the detective's expression, Clyde put the question eagerly.

Purcell nodded. "I want to talk to you about it. Shall we go to your room where we can have privacy?"

As soon as they were alone he took from his pocket a knife wrapped in a silk handkerchief. He laid it on the table.

"I'm taking it up to the Yard for finger print examination. Don't touch it...just leave it in the handkerchief...but look at the blade...those rust marks...blood. That, I am fairly certain is the weapon that was used to kill Escande."

"You found this in Reggie's rooms?"

"Yes. On a ledge in the chimney—you know how wide these old-fashioned chimneys are...in former days men hid in them. Some people seem to think they're perfect as places of concealment...but I always go for them first!"

"You don't think this points to Reggie being the killer?"

"Frankly, I don't. There are so many conflicting items of evidence...the knife may have been planted on him. I shall, of course, keep him under observation."

"You'll tell his uncle?"

"Better not just yet. We must keep this to ourselves."

"I think we owe it to Mr. Jessel to tell him this latest development. He asked me to let him know if anything fresh turned up."

"You can tell him if you like. I suppose we can rely upon his keeping it secret, I *sha'n't* make any move until I hear from the police headquarters in Rio. They'll make that woman speak...they've got their own methods. Not the kind we use at the Yard." He glanced at his watch. "I must get back to London now. I'll call on my way to see Inspector Ford and get him to put two of his men on to watching Stacey and Matteos. Care to come back to town with me?"

"No, thanks. I think I'll stay here."

"There's an attraction here that pulls, of course." Purcell spoke with bitterness. "It may interest you to know that I'm not in the running any more...with her."

"You mean Sally....."

"Has turned me down. Flat. When we were on board I got the idea that she liked me. Perhaps you've cut me out."

"I wish I could think that," said Clyde thinking ruefully of Sally's brusque manner when he had last spoken to her. "I don't think she has much use for either of us, Purcell."

"Huh! Glad at any rate that I'm not going to see you step in and take her under my very nose. There's another chap, of course."

"Did she tell you that?"

"She gave me to understand that. Quite clearly." There was a moment's silence and then, as if pulling himself together after a blow, Purcell said in a changed voice, "I'll be getting along."

Clyde went down with him to the garage when he got out his car. After the detective had departed, he

sought out Jessel. It surprised him to find that he was working on his history, deeply absorbed, and, for the time at least, oblivious of the shadow of tragedy that hung over the house. This vaguely irritated Clyde...he could not sympathise with such detachment.

"I hope I'm not interrupting you too much, Mr. Jessel," he said, "but I have something important to tell you."

Jessel looked up. "There's no peace nowadays," he said a trifle pettishly. "I suppose your important news relates to the murder."

"I'm afraid it does, Mr. Jessel. You asked me to keep you in touch with the latest developments."

"Of course I did. You must think me very unreasonable...but there seems only one topic—and that a gruesome one enough—in the household these days."

"When the mystery is cleared up there will be no need to discuss it again."

Jessel's apathy vanished. He swung eagerly round in his chair. "Then the mystery has been solved?"

"There are some new clues. Unfortunately one of them relates to Reggie."

"To Reggie? What do you mean?"

"The knife with which the murder was committed has been discovered in Reggie's room."

When he saw the effect of his words, Clyde regretted that he had not approached the subject more adroitly. For some moments Jessel seemed unable to speak. He shivered, and dropped his face in his hands.

"Forgive me if I told you too bluntly," said Clyde, contrition in his voice. "And don't imagine that this implicates Reggie completely."

surely all this can't be true. Tell me, has that detective spoken to Reggie about this?"

"Not yet. He said if I was to tell you it was only if you would promise to preserve the greatest secrecy about that clue."

"If Reggie is to know I must be allowed to prepare him beforehand."

Clyde shook his head. "I am quite certain Purcell would not want you to do that...Leave it to him. He understands these matters better than we do and would understand how to approach Reggie."

Jessel began to pace the floor again. "That such a thing should happen...such a slur on our proud name."

Clyde looked at him significantly. "Is that all you are thinking of?"

"No...It is far worse than that."

"Then you...suspect Reggie?"

Jessel turned aside his head and did not speak for some moments. Then he said, slowly, "In this history I am writing there are certain dark incidents in the annals of the family. One of our line died in a mad-house...another was held to be guilty of killing one of his footmen...but it was never rightly proved. Now do you know why I am suffering such an agony of apprehension?"

"If that is what you fear...then I think I can set your mind at rest. You think Reggie had a violent quarrel with his tutor, that when they went out walking together they got to blows and Reggie stabbed the tutor?"

"May God forgive me...I do believe that."

"I believe the affair is much more complicated than that. It is almost certainly established that the man

who killed Howarth Ripley in Rio also struck down Escande."

"But isn't that theory a little far-fetched?"

"Not when the details are linked up. Now, you don't believe Reggie killed his kinsman in Rio, do you?"

"His kinsman indeed! I tell you that man was an impostor if he claimed relationship with our family. And why should he be in any way connected with the murder here?"

"He received his death blow in the same fashion and obviously from the same hand."

Jessel shook his head. "Forgive me...that seems too fantastic to entertain."

"You persist in suspecting your own nephew, Mr. Jessel?"

"I don't want to suspect him, God knows. Only...knowing his weak erratic character, his violent uncontrollable temper I am horribly afraid...You say I should not approach him about this matter?"

"Please don't. Nothing must be done until Purcell returns."

"When will that be?"

"In a day or two, I believe. But he will phone you in the morning."

"In the meantime, we are to live in a state of frightful suspense...And how are we to keep silent if Reggie suspects that we know everything?"

"But how can he suspect. It is up to us to give him no hint of how matters stand."

"I was thinking of...that knife. He might go to the hiding place and find that it had gone."

"He could only do that if he knew it had been concealed there...in short, if he were guilty."

"That's true. If he's not guilty he can't possibly suspect anything." Jessel looked relieved. "Why, there's a simple solution, my friend. We'll watch Reggie...if he seems the same, his manner unperturbed, then we can be sure he knows nothing of the existence of the knife in his room."

"That's an ingenious idea of yours, Mr. Jessel. And I believe it will set your mind at rest."

"Then you believe the boy to be innocent?"

"I do. Since I came here I have got to know him fairly well...He confides in me. Given a chance in another direction his character could be shall I say...built up?"

"I'm glad you believe in him." Jessel turned once more to his desk, and with a distracted gesture began to gather up the papers of his manuscript. Watching him, Clyde thought, "this new chapter in the family history—will it ever be written?"

"There has been a new and distressing development, and we need your immediate help."

He was obviously attempting to conceal his agitation and to assume an air of calmness. But his hands were trembling slightly, his face was drawn.

Purcell glanced beyond him to Clyde whose expression was also grave and troubled.

"Soames said something had happened, but he had been given orders not to talk about it," said the detective. "What's the mystery, Mr. Jessel?"

"Let us sit down and decide on a plan of action," replied Jessel. As soon as they were seated, he added, in dramatic tones, "Reggie has disappeared."

The news gave Purcell a jolt. "When did this happen?"

"It was discovered this morning. When the maid took his morning tea she found the door was locked. Getting no reply she fetched Soames. He hammered on the door for some time then came to me. Together we forced the lock, burst open the door to find the room empty."

"Had the bed been slept in?"

"No. Everything was undisturbed. No message had been left..."

"Did he take anything with him...clothes or other belongings?"

"As far as I can ascertain nothing is missing."

"Have you informed Inspector Ford?"

"No. I.....I.....preferred to wait until you came. I didn't want the affair to be discussed in the village."

"Why? The more publicity the better chance we have of finding him."

Jessel shivered. "Very unwelcome publicity. If we can trace him without incurring any scandal, surely that will be better."

Purcell's expression was grim. "I'm not interested in saving your name from a scandal, Mr. Jessel. In view of the enquiries I am making, Sir Reginald's disappearance is of immense significance." He got up. "If you don't mind I'll look round his rooms now. Then I'd like to question the servants—particularly the outdoor staff."

Jessel rose. "I'll take you up myself."

But it was not in the bedroom that Purcell began his investigations. He concentrated on Reggie's study, beginning with the chimney which he examined inside with the aid of a torch and his magnifying glass. "Someone has fingered this ledge in the chimney since I last examined it," he commented.

"Then he did go to look for the knife," murmured Jessel in tremulous tones.

Purcell looked sharply at Clyde. "You told Mr. Jessel of my discovery."

"Yes. You know we agreed that it would be better since we could depend upon his keeping the matter secret."

"True. But I think we've made a mistake there. Now I'll see the bedroom."

He first examined the broken lock. "Was the key in the floor when you and Soames broke in?" asked Jessel.

"Why....now I come to think of it, I don't remember seeing it. Having forced the door open the key doesn't seem of much importance."

"I think it is. It's obvious the door has been opened from the outside. Therefore the key in this case is rather an important clue."

"Locked from outside! What a strange idea. Then Reggie will have the key with him now."

"Perhaps he hasn't. Whoever has it will be able to give me some vital information." The detective resumed his search of the room. Then after making some notes he returned to the library and proceeded to question the servants.

Their evidence was of little assistance. Not one of them appeared to have seen Reggie leave the Priory after dinner the preceding night, no noise had been heard. The detective questioned Soames closely.

"It is your duty to supervise the locking up at night?"

"Yes, sir."

"All was fastened securely as usual last night before you retired?"

"Yes, sir."

"And when you came down this morning did you find any doors or windows unbolted?"

"No, Sir. All was as I had left it."

"I thought you said the library window was unfastened," put in Jessel.

"Yes, sir...I'd forgotten." He turned to the detective. "As you know, it's a french window. I noticed particularly it was open when I went in as the wind had blown the black-out curtains aside, and I switched off the light until I put them right. But I remember locking it when I drew the curtains the previous evening."

"Why didn't you tell me that at first?"

"I didn't think it was important. The family or guests sometimes open the windows if the rooms seem too warm, sir."

"When did you last see Sir Reginald."

"It was at dinner, Sir."

"Did he seem the same as usual?"

"I noticed he seemed upset. And he ate very little. But of course since the tragedy he's not been himself."

"Do you know at what hour he retired?"

"He went up to his study about ten-thirty, sir. I was crossing the hall and saw him go upstairs."

"Did he speak to you?"

"No, sir. I wished him good-night, but he didn't answer."

"Did that surprise you?"

"Well, sir not exactly," the butler hesitated. "Sir Reginald is given to moods...sometimes very affable... and then at other times quite drawn into himself, if you know what I mean."

Purcell nodded. "That will be all for the moment thank you." He turned to Jessel. "There are one or two other points that with your help I might clear up."

After the servants had left the library where the detective had been questioning them, Jessel remarked with a trace of weariness.

"I have told you everything I know. All this questioning doesn't seem to have taken us very far."

Purcell gave him an enigmatic smile. "That's where I must differ from you. Also, I don't think you have told me everything you know about Sir Reginald's disappearance."

"You suggest that I am withholding information?"

"Shall I say that you are trying to shield your nephew? You were told about the discovery of the knife in Sir Reginald's apartment?"

"Yes."

"You were asked to keep that discovery secret?"

Jessel flushed uncomfortably. "I did give my word not to mention it."

The detective said nothing but looked at him steadily. Jessel threw out his hands with a resigned gesture. "I don't know what you'll think of me...or you, either, Mr. Moncrieff. I have broken my promise to you. I felt I must speak to Reggie myself about this affair...try to get him to tell me his version...or at all events, find out if he knew nothing about the knife being found in the chimney of his room. I feel that I have not acted very honorably," his voice broke a little, "but I have been so distracted."

"I can sympathise with you...you've been through a pretty bad time. I'm sorry you told Sir Reginald before my investigation was complete. It's complicated things, you see. He's got the wind up and bolted."

"If only I could have foreseen this...I've done more harm than good."

"Don't let it worry you too much. How did he take it?"

"He was very excited. There was a stormy scene. He kept reiterating that he hadn't done the murder."

"Do you think he did it, Mr. Jessel?"

Jessel averted his head. "How can you put such a question to me. Am I not his uncle?"

"I can't see that the relationship makes any difference. I believe your suspicions have been aroused. Come, tell me exactly what passed between you."

"I have told you everything. I swear it. I can't remember the conversation word for word. But when Reggie went out of the room he said you would never take him."

"When did this conversation take place."

"Last evening in my study. After dinner."

"What time was it when he left you?"

"Somewhere about ten-thirty, I believe."

"That is when Soames saw him go up to his room?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Thank you, Mr. Jessel. Now, if you don't mind, I'll go to the garage and examine Sir Reginald's car."

Clyde accompanied him to the garage. He was looking contrite?

"You were right," he said. "I ought not to have told Jessel about your finding that knife in Reggie's room. It's messed everything up."

"I wouldn't say that...just given another turn to the affair."

"Glad that's how you take it. I thought you were going to fire me."

"On the contrary I know a way in which you can be of immense help."

"That's fine. I guess you C. I. D. men over here have different methods...from ours."

"In what way?"

"Well, we should have got busy the moment we heard of Reggie's disappearance.....set the wires buzzing...got out police cars...scoured the country...instead of sitting back firing off questions. That would have waited...."

He paused for Purcell was chuckling.

"So you think I'm a bit slow, eh?"

"I wouldn't say that exactly..."

"But you think it. And I don't blame you. What's the good of notifying the police throughout the country, sending out cars, when I know where my man is already."

"You know?"

"Yes."

"Then where...." Clyde paused. "But perhaps you won't want to trust me with any more secrets."

"I'll have to trust you with this one. Because I'm going to rely on your help."

"Where do you think he is to be found?"

Purcell jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the Priory. "In there."

"So you think he hasn't bolted after all?"

"I don't think. I know."

"I get you." Clyde smote his brow. "To think I could have been so dumb...Jessel's hiding Reggie until this trouble blows over. He believes he's guilty and means, perhaps, to get him out of the country...to save the family being disgraced, I suppose."

"He's certainly hiding him. And there isn't a better place for that plan in the whole of England."

"Gosh, you're right. Mr. Jessel has shown me some of the underground dungeons...In the days of the Royalist risings they used to conceal political rebels there. There's a tunnel, too, a mile long...it used to link up with another house in the neighbourhood that has since been demolished—"

"You've done a good job of work getting to know something of the history of the place," broke in Purcell. "Now you know your way about, I want you to explore those subterranean passages—and lose no time about it...it'll give you a chance to show what Yankee hustle can do."

"You mean...to-night?"

"I do. I shall let Jessel think we're going to scour the countryside...drag ponds and so on. Then when I get your information you'll see that I can be snappy on the job. Think you can carry it off?"

"Just give me the chance. Sure to be a tough job. But when I went exploring the place with Jessel, I made a special note of those underground passages. He showed me the secret compartment that led to the tunnel. I guess I'll make for that first."

"Good boy. Here's the garage...now for examining the car."

"But do you think anything will be gained by that...in view of your theory?"

Purcell chuckled. "Everything will be gained.....if I can put Jessel on a wrong scent."

Clyde looked at him sharply. He was puzzled by a certain inflection in the detective's voice. With a flash of insight it occurred to him that Purcell knew something that he would not reveal. Not only Jessel but Clyde himself was being put on the wrong scent.

CHAPTER XXV

IT seemed to Clyde that hours had elapsed since he had crept down the great front staircase with such infinite caution, his ears strained to catch any sound, feeling that this part of his adventure was the most perilous. Once in the subterranean passages of the Priory, he could investigate without fear of being discovered at the task.

This was what he imagined when he set out; but now he had reached his goal, he was feeling less confident. It was three o'clock in the morning, said to be zero hour for mankind, and just then Clyde heartily endorsed this supposition. The atmosphere was dank and sent a piercing chill through his bones; the darkness which he pierced with powerful torch, seemed, beyond that narrow beam of light, to close about him with a thickness that could be felt. The low roofed apartments which he entered from the broad flagged passages, were like tombs. There was the smell of the charnel-house about them.

Something made him start violently...it was nothing more than the sound of dripping water in one of the cells but, he found he was trembling, and looking furtively over his shoulder.

"Seems as if I've got the jitters," he said half aloud. "Can you beat it.... What would friend Purcell say? I've got to pull myself together."

More resolute now, he followed the devious trend of the passage until he located the apartment from which led the secret tunnel. Jessel had already shown him this, in their exhaustive tour of the Priory; but Clyde

had refreshed his memory by carefully examining the ancient plan of the building.

It was a much larger apartment than the others, but had the same low ceiling, the same earthly smell. Clyde threw his torch into every corner of it, revealing a small flight of steps, and beyond them a massive door.

Examining the door, Clyde instantly forgot his imaginative fears in the excitement of a thrilling discovery.

The door which, when he had last seen it in the company of Jessel, was covered with the rust and grime of centuries, had quite recently been opened. There were evidences that it had not yielded easily, and heavy blows had been hammered on to it. One of the great hinges had broken. As he bent down eagerly examining the many fingerprints so clearly outlined in the dust, a sound broke on his ears. This time it was not the drip of water, but shuffling footsteps. Clyde started back, his supernatural fears returning. His active imaginative brain conjured up scenes of cruelty and violence that had taken place centuries ago...no doubt there had been men who died in these dungeons...perhaps in the one in which he was actually standing...they might have been tortured, left to perish of thirst and starvation...the shuffling footsteps drew nearer.

Clyde swung round, straining his ears. The footsteps had halted. A voice said: "What are you doing here?"

For a moment Clyde felt a rush of relief to know that the queer shuffling footsteps had been human. Then, as the nervous panic died, he was seized with embarrassment and confusion to see Jessel standing in the doorway that led into the main passage.

"I...I...had a reason for coming down here," he stammered.

"Obviously. But perhaps you'll tell me that reason, Mr. Moncrieff. It seems very odd behaviour on the part of a guest."

Clyde smothered a curse of annoyance that rose to his lips. How hopelessly he had bungled this affair. Was it through any direct fault of his own? He must have made some noise in coming down here, Jessel had been disturbed and followed him. And his ready mind could not offer even the lamest of excuses for his behaviour.

"I am waiting," added Jessel distantly.

How different indeed, were his cold angry tones with his usual easy affability. Clyde was not surprised at this. He was aware that his conduct must seem monstrous. But this time he had no intention of revealing Purcell's plans to anyone.

"Just now I can't tell you. It also implicates someone else. Some day I shall be able to explain and you will see that I was justified in my search——"

"Search? So you are looking for something down here? Is it hidden treasure, may I ask?"

Clyde flushed in the darkness. "I am not a thief."

"I might have greater confidence in you, if you could give me some explanation of your conduct."

Clyde bore this shaft in silence.

"If you refuse to speak on your own behalf, perhaps you will let me know who is this person also implicated?"

Clyde merely shrugged his shoulders. By the light of his torch he observed that Jessel was fully dressed. There was nothing hurried or incomplete in his toilette, thus it was evident he had not retired that night. Not surprising, perhaps, in view of his apparent distress at Reggie's disappearance.

"Do you mind if we leave this discussion until later, when I can give you a perfectly feasible explana-

tion? I don't exactly like this background, and it's devilishly cold."

"I must apologise. If I had known that my guest was coming here I could have given orders for some heating and other comforts to be provided."

Clyde was beginning to lose his temper. The acid contempt in the other man's voice was unbearable. "Quit fooling," he said abruptly. "I'd no right to search his place, and if I've offended you I'm sorry. At the same time I'm not sorry I came down here."

"I think you will be sorry, my friend, eventually. Ah yes, very sorry. You've made a blunder this time. And it has landed you in a very awkward situation."

"You talk as if you're going to bring a charge against me...that's pretty thin, Mr. Jessel."

"You're wrong. I shall bring no charge against you."

"It's good to hear that, anyway. And now, with your permission, I'll get back to my room." He took a step towards the door.

"Stand where you are." Jessel's voice, sharp and commanding, had a new note in it. He had put his right hand in his jacket pocket. Clyde saw that he held a revolver. "Move another step and I'll put a bullet through you."

Clyde gave a short laugh. "So you think I'm dangerous."

"You are dangerous. But I didn't suspect you at first."

"Suspect me? Of what?"

"The time has come to drop this pretence. I can see through your game. Pity I didn't from the first. You came here to spy out the land. I'll admit you were clever. And, but for one slip, you would have got away with it."

"You know my reason for coming here?"

"I do. And, as you see, the game is up. You are not going to make any more investigations, my smart American friend."

"You're right," replied Clyde drily. "I've found out now what I wanted to know." He had a moment's chagrin when he reflected that Purcell had made a similar discovery ahead of him.

"There's something else that you've got to know ...It's this. You came prowling down here to-night at your own risk. I suppose you were prepared for something unpleasant happening to you if you were found out."

Clyde stared at the revolver with which Jessel was punctuating his words as he raised it slightly in his hand. His brain was working rapidly. True the other man had the gun, but, if he snatched the right opportunity, and they came to grips he had no doubt about the result. Cautiously, he shifted his position and set his back against the wall. He had slipped his torch in the right hand pocket of his jacket. He might get the chance to flash it in Jessel's face, throw him for a fraction of a second off his guard. First, he must make him talk.

"If I appear to have abused your hospitality as a guest, you're not, showing yourself to be the perfect host," he said coolly.

"Supposing you put down that gun and we talk sensibly? Why should you want to kill me?"

"It's a question of you or me. As the choice lies in my hands, naturally, I prefer that you should be sacrificed. You must die because you know too much. You found amongst my papers proofs of Howard Ripley's identity—you knew that he was a member of the Jessel family. And you mean to use that knowledge against me."

"I meant to find out why you went to such lengths to disown him. It wasn't a question of family pride."

"Family pride! What do you know of that to make such a remark. You fool, it can be stronger than life. It is the mainspring of my very existence. There is no one I would not sacrifice to it—there is nothing I would not do to preserve the honour of the proud and noble family of the Jessels. I have done dreadful deeds to save our name. That is my idea of family pride!"

"God.....you're nothing but a cold-blooded murderer."

"Not cold-blooded, I assure you. What I had to do has caused me extreme anguish because of its necessity. But not the slightest remorse. You have thrust yourself into my plans...you have only yourself to blame for what is going to happen to you. You are not going to leave this place alive!"

CHAPTER XXVI

CLYDE steeled his nerves in an effort to survey the situation calmly. He must show no sign of panic; try to humour Jessel. Therein lay his only chance of escape.

"You have every reason to be proud of your distinguished family," he said in tones as level and unemotional as he could make them. "But is it worthy of a Jessel to want to kill a man like a rat, giving him no chance of putting up any defence?"

"It is to save the honour of the Jessels that I am going to remove you. You think I shrink from doing that.... I do not shrink from anything."

"I don't understand what you're talking about. I have no intention of doing you any harm. Won't you at least tell me what it is you have against me?"

"What does it matter? It is a long story...one that you are not capable of understanding."

Clyde experienced a flicker of hope. The longer the story the greater his chances of snatching a moment when Jessel might be off his guard. With an air of humility, he said.

"Please tell me the story. Even if you think I shan't understand it, it's the last request I am making."

Jessel nodded. He moved away slightly from the open door. He was carrying a powerful torch, lantern shape, and this he set down on a narrow stone shelf near the floor. Not for one second did he lower the revolver or alter its direction.

"Because I know it is your last request I shall tell you the story. It is a confession and no one will ever hear it but yourself. I have already told you that there is no sacrifice too great for me to make to save the honour of my family. Perhaps, then, you can imagine the years of bitterness I have endured knowing that my dead brother's son, Reggie, was to inherit Greystokes Priory and carry on our famous name...that vicious decadent youth, with no pride of race, and with so little interest in this historic old place, he has threatened to sell it on attaining his majority. I hated him with every fibre of my being..." Clyde shivered to hear the passion of hatred in this voice..."Hated him so much that I never ceased to long for him to die. He was a delicate youth and this seemed a hopeful possibility. But, as he grew older it was the weakness of his character that became more marked than the deterioration in his health. And so I was able to foresee what was going to happen."

He paused for a moment, as if lost in meditation. Clyde slightly altered his position, but even that careful movement was noted by Jessel, who remarked with an inflection of sarcasm.

"Perhaps you are tired of standing...hadn't you better sit down...my story may take some time."

"I am not tired, and perfectly able to stand," replied Clyde. "Go on. Your story interests me."

"I foresaw that Reggie would disgrace the noble name he had inherited. He would run through his fortune...it would not take long for crooks and harpies to relieve him of his money. Gradually he would sell everything, the famous pictures, the heirlooms which I have heard him refer to as 'junk'. I saw that he would bring the name of Jessel to the dust and so I decided to kill him."

"God...you can't mean that!" exclaimed Clyde involuntarily.

Then, just when the time seemed ripe, there was an amazing development. I had a communication from the man who styled himself Howarth Ripley."

"You've known about Howarth Ripley all the time?"

"Yes, my friend...I threw dust in your eyes...I also hoodwinked Purcell, the smart detective. I swore that the man was an impostor when he claimed to belong to our family. But I found out that his claim was just. Not that the fellow himself was aware how closely related he was to us. For some reason his mother had kept the real facts of his parentage secret. I had to make exhaustive enquiries, and it was only after a long careful search that I discovered the truth..."

"The truth?" For a moment Clyde forgot his own desperate position in his interest in the story. "Who was this Howarth Ripley?"

"My eldest brother's child."

"You mean he was Reggie's brother?"

"His half brother. Unknown to the family, my brother married when he was still at Oxford. The girl was a barmaid. It seems the marriage didn't last long. She was a bad lot. She left him soon after the child was born. He divorced her...She disappeared...went abroad to South America, taking the child with her. For years she was associated with a man called Ripley...my nephew adopted his name. He seems to have inherited the worst traits of both sides of his family...his shady career is known to you."

"Then it was he—and not Reggie—who was the heir to the baronetcy."

"Surely that's clear enough. My state of mind on making this discovery is indescribable...He was Sir Norman Jessel...a crook, blackmailer who, sooner or later was sure to discover that he was the heir. At

the moment he communicated with me, he merely believed himself to be a very distant relation from something his mother had revealed. He approached me for money. It was then I began my investigations. As soon as I knew the truth, I decided on my plan of action. I employed a trusted private agent to shadow the man. He sent me an exhaustive report on my nephew's activities, and they did not make a pretty story. It confirmed me in my decision."

"You mean...to go to Rio?"

"Exactly. The final stage in my plan."

"I know the final stage. You knew where to find him...you followed him to the opium den." "Horror" was in Clyde's voice. "It was you who killed him."

"Yes, I killed him. I stabbed him to the heart...a quick silent end if you know the knack...and have a strong wrist...my wrists, are like steel. It was a perfect stroke. In the confusion that followed I got away, and returned to the ship then lying in the harbour without anyone knowing that I had been ashore that night. I had gone early to my cabin, saying that I was not feeling well and did not wish to be disturbed. It was the perfect murder."

"Not quite...you left the knife behind."

"True. But I could not be found with it in my possession. I did not hope to get away as easily as I did."

"How did you come to use a knife that belonged to Escande?"

"I thought it was Reggie's. I picked it up one day in his cabin."

"That knife was a very important clue."

Jessel made a restless movement. "There was one thing that I had not foreseen. The knife was traced to Escande....the detective questioned him. From that Escande learnt the truth——"

"You mean....the truth about the murder?"

"Yes. He confronted me with it, the rat. I saw what his game was...blackmail. I pretended to agree to his demands...arranged that a large sum of money should be paid to him regularly to ensure his silence." Jessel chuckled again. "I silenced him all right. That same day I saw him set out for his usual walk with Reggie. From the library I saw them cross the Terrace. They appeared to be arguing angrily. Suddenly Reggie turned and went off by himself in an opposite direction. Then I had an inspiration. I seemed to hear a voice which said quite clearly and distinctly. "Follow Escande." I ran into the small room that Reggie uses as a sort of workshop...took up a knife that was on the bench and put it into my pocket. Then I went out. I overtook the Frenchman...said there was something important I wanted to say to him...We entered the spinney where, later, his body was found. It was even more simple than the affair in Rio. Escande was taken completely by surprise and offered no resistance."

Listening to Jessel's calm, almost detached description of a cold-blooded murder, Clyde realised how slender were his own chances of escape from this desperate man.

"This time I took away the knife. I hid it in Reggie's room," went on Jessel. "But the weapon was discovered, as I saw when, later, I returned to the hiding place. I realised that suspicion had fallen on Reggie, and knew that the time for his removal was ripe. Following the questioning by the police, the knife being found in his room, his disappearance would deepen the suspicion against him. It would be assumed that he had committed suicide. There would follow a widespread search for his body. The fact that it would never be discovered would develop into a first class mystery...but gradually the affair would be forgotten. It's really all quite simple, you see, if one only looks ahead and thinks out the natural sequence of events."

Clyde shrank back against the wall shuddering, as he thought of Reggie's terrible fate. He heard a voice strangely unlike his own demanding:

"What...what happened to Reggie?"

"Ah, with Reggie I was more subtle in my methods. On the night of his disappearance, when everyone had retired I told Reggie to come to my study as I had something very important to discuss with him. He was in a very difficult mood, excited and in a state of distress about the death of Escande. I pretended to soothe him, and asked him to have a drink. The whisky was heavily doped and took action almost at once. And now the most difficult part of my task lay before me...to carry Reggie's unconscious form down here."

"Down here?"

"What better hiding place? But it was not too easy getting him down...the narrow steps, the winding passages, but at last——"

"Where is he?" demanded Clyde a sickening premonition sweeping over him....

"Not far from the place you were so closely examining when I came in and surprised you. But there's one thing you don't know about the secret tunnel...it conceals an old well...very useful for my purpose——"

"God, this is horrible," Clyde burst out.

"I didn't expect you to be so squeamish...you took considerable risk in making your investigations about the murder of Escande....I expected you to be tougher. If what I have done seems horrible to you, you must see that it was all very necessary. I consider the world is better for my action, since I have removed from it three worthless people, likely to do more harm than good. In your own case, you have only yourself to blame."

"In...my case?" For a moment Clyde felt that the situation was too fantastic to be real...this was some grotesque nightmare from which he must surely soon waken. "You can have no grudge against me. What have I done to thwart your schemes——"

"You were a little too curious my friend...too emphatic in your belief that Reggie could not have murdered Escande. I saw the line you were taking, and that it might have dangerous consequences for myself. When I saw you, last evening, studying the ancient ground plan of Greystokes Priory, I decided that you knew too much. That is why you are going to be silenced."

"You mean you're going to shoot me without giving me a chance——"

"You're mistaken. I have no intention of shooting you. That would be a quick, easy death...one you don't deserve. You have taken advantage of my friendship, the confidence I had in you by spying on me. I regard you as a traitor...and the best punishment for a traitor is to give him ample time to dwell upon the consequences of his treachery. I am going to lock you in here...no chance of escape...look at that massive door...you might beat on it in vain...shout yourself hoarse...you will not be heard...ah, wait a moment. I know what you are going to say. That you will be missed, enquiries will be set on foot...but I have made provision for that. I shall give it out that you told me last night you had some important business in London and wanted to get up as quickly as possible in the morning. I shall say that you decided to get the seven o'clock bus from Fordingbrooke which would take you to the station, and that you did not wish the servants to serve you a meal before departing as you would have breakfast on the train. Luckily, being an American you haven't the British mania for the early morning cup of tea in your room...otherwise that might have been awkward. You depart, therefore, taking your suitcase, and I have ostensibly, run you to Fording-

brooke in the car. Since so many evacuees came to the district and the big new factory opened up three miles from there, it is busy at the bus stop. Even so early in the morning, there are many strangers about. No one could possibly testify that you did not travel on that bus. For a time at least, no enquiries will be made about you. You have told me yourself that you have made no friends in London, only a few casual acquaintances. You will not be missed. The detective, Purcell, will want to know where you've gone. He is the most likely to question your absence and to set about finding what has become of you. He will not find you. And no one will ever dream that I am responsible for your strange disappearance."

"Wait a moment," Clyde said harshly. "You think that by disposing of me the last scrap of evidence against you is destroyed. You are wrong, because you are in the deadliest peril yourself...listen. Do you know a man called Matteos?"

"I do not."

"You have said that you saw a stranger near the lodge on the day of the murder of Escande?"

"That is quite true. I didn't invent that."

He is the brother of Cara Matteos, the woman who was attached to Howarth Ripley whom you killed. Does that mean nothing to you. He has come over here with a message for you."

Jessel's eyes glinted angrily. "I see your game. You are inventing this nonsense to gain time. "He made a brusque movement and Clyde, believing he saw his opportunity, rushed forward to hurl himself on the other man. But Jessel was even quicker than he. He sprang back and the next moment the massive iron studded door had closed behind him. The key turned in the lock. Clyde rushed at the door, trying to shake it, beating on it with his fists, shouting and cursing aloud in his impotent rage. Then suddenly he became

calm. As Jessel had said, such demonstrations were useless. No one was likely to hear him...unless they came down here especially to search for him. His one hope lay in Purcell. Yet Purcell was absorbed in his investigations; he might, at first, be likely to accept Jessel's explanation about his absence. It had sounded plausible enough. He looked round. How long would he be able to hold out in this dungeon without food or water? Thank God Jessel had left the lantern torch with its powerful battery, behind. Its strong beams shone on the uneven floor, the damp walls, and on the half opened door that led to the secret tunnel. In the direction of this tunnel Clyde found his gaze wandering fearfully. He thought of the horror that lay beyond it, the sinister well, and shrank back shuddering. For some moments morbid terror overcame him. With a stupendous effort he shook off this terror, and seizing the torch, he set off resolutely on an inspection of the tunnel.

CHAPTER XXVII

PURCELL greeted Soames briskly as he came to the door to him and, stepping across the threshold, enquired.

"May I see Mr. Jessel?"

Soames hesitated for a moment. "He is just now, sir. He was up so very early this morning as he took Mr. Moncrieff to catch the seven o'clock train from Fordingbrooke." The detective looked at his watch. "Mr. Moncrieff has left?"

"He had some important business in London, sir. I understand, sir."

"When is he coming back?"

"I don't know, sir. He took his suitcase with him."

Purcell stood for a moment lost in thought. "It was a development he had not foreseen. I will leave any message for me?"

"Perhaps Mr. Jessel can tell you that."

"I'll come in to see him later. And, by the way, Soames, a man, giving his name as Matteo, has been calling to see Mr. Jessel. I want you to show him to the library."

"Very good, sir." Soames raised his eyebrows. "The way detectives gave orders! Behaved as if they owned the place. Purcell, unobservant as he is, butler's stiffness of manner, gave him a brief nod and strode out again. As he was swinging down the stairs he heard his name called. Looking round, he

For a moment Purcell was silent. Then, putting his hand on her shoulder he looked keenly into her face.

"So it's Clyde, eh?"

She shook off his hand half petulantly. "What do you mean?"

"You can guess what I mean. I knew, when you turned me down that there was someone else....But Moncrieff thought that, too."

She flushed. "He has been discussing me?"

"There's no need to be vexed about that. I should think the chap never lived who, having met you, could help discussing you, Sally. I don't think you've any reason for believing that Clyde was indifferent when he went off without saying good-bye. He's on some trail of his own, I reckon." Purcell chuckled. "He's a keen amateur detective, you know...though he's a lot to learn."

"So have professionals sometimes. Are you any nearer solving this mystery?"

"That's a leading question. I'm not compelled to answer it, Sally."

She looked at him searchingly. "I believe you know something—very important."

"Perhaps I do."

"Do tell me...I can keep a secret."

"That's what every woman says. Honestly, I believe you are the rare type who could keep a secret. Ask me the same question in, say, a couple of hours and I promise to give you a frank answer."

"Now you're acting the inscrutable sleuth..."

He laughed. "Not acting. That's what I am." He glanced at his watch. "I've got an appointment, so I must push off." The laughter died out of his eyes

She saw his deep concentrated expression and knew that his mind was wholly on his investigations.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when Jessel descended the main staircase. His manner was calm and urbane. Beyond a slightly feverish glitter in his eyes, there was nothing about him that hinted at the ordeal of the previous night. He smiled gently on Soames who approached him as he crossed the hall.

"There's a gentleman waiting to see you, sir," said Soames with some slight constraint in his manner. "He's in the library."

"And his name?"

"It's a Mr. Matteos, sir."

"Matteos?" That glitter in his eyes became more marked, his fingers twitched. For the second time within the last few hours he was to hear that name. What was it the American had said.... "The brother of Cara Matteos, the woman who was attached to Howarth Ripley whom you killed." So he hadn't been putting up a bluff to gain time! This person existed. He strode quickly to the library.

Matteos was standing by the long french windows staring across the garden. He turned as Jessel entered. Ignoring any form of greeting he remarked with scarce veiled insolence.

"I came with a message for Monsieur Escande. but it seems I was too late."

Jessel regarded him coldly. "What is your reason for wishing to see me?"

Matteos held out a slip of paper. "It may interest you to read a copy of the letter written to the man who was murdered."

"I have no desire to read a letter that is not intended for me."

"No? But perhaps, all the same, it may be of great interest to you...yes, very great interest."

Jessel took the paper extended to him. He read it in silence. But when he raised his head, the pallor of his face was startling. "W-what has this to do with me?" he stammered.

"That is what I desire to know...perhaps you can tell me the identity of J.2x. J...that is the initial of your own name...that is quite a pretty puzzle, is it not?"

"Get out of here, you swine. I know nothing of this affair. But I can see your game...the same as the Frenchman's...blackmail."

"That is an ugly word, Mr. Jessel. If we had witnesses it might prove awkward for you, making such libellous statements. No, I do not come to blackmail you."

"No? What about this phrase in the letter, 'Voici le moment de vous en profiter'...that means nothing, I suppose?"

"You forget that I did not write the letter...nor was it addressed to you. Odd that the idea of blackmail should leap to your mind, Mr. Jessel. Only guilty people are blackmailed."

"Guilty, do you say?"

"Yes. Pardon me, but you do not look like an innocent man...you look like one who has an ugly secret to conceal..."

"Stop this game of cat playing with mouse. I can see you know everything. And I thought it so safe.. that I had left no traces...and now you come to threaten me...you hound. Yes, you know I killed Howart Ripley...but I know how to silence you...it won't be with money..." his hand went to his jacket pocket Matteo's dodged instinctively as he fired. At the same moment Purcell stepped from behind the tall leather screen near the fireplace, and deftly jerked Jessel's elbow upward. The revolver fell to the floor.

"I have a warrant for your arrest," he said. "You are charged with the murder of Norman Jessel, some-
one Howarth Ripley." Purcell made a sign to the
two police officers who had been waiting near the
French windows. They came into the library.

Jessel looked at them, his face now expressionless.
He turned to the detective.

"I congratulate you, Mr. Purcell. It was a clever
stroke on your part to get a confession from me by
employing this man Matteos as a kind of decoy." He
smiled slightly, his manner urbane, his voice gentle and
courteous as usual. "I know when I am beaten.
I shall go quietly. I have one small favour to ask. I am
convinced that my butler, Soames, having heard the
shot just now, is at the moment listening at the door.
Will you fetch him in here.....I don't want him to
spread this story about until I have left. You must
insist on his silence."

Purcell nodded. It seemed a reasonable enough
request. He turned to one of the officers and gave him
the order. Jessel saw that his ruse had succeeded.

Making use of that unguarded moment, he swooped
on the revolver which had fallen to the ground. He
put it to his temple. A shot rang out.

Seeing his intention Purcell had sprung forward,
but this time he was a second too late. Owen Jessel,
the last of his once illustrious family, lay in a crumpled
heap, a bullet through his brain.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WITH that clever cunning which distinguished all his plans, Jessel might have brought about the death of Clyde, without suspicion falling on himself. What he had not suspected—when he locked the massive door and left Clyde in the dungeon with its grim secret tunnel—was that Purcell knew of Clyde's search on that night...and also possessed a rough subterranean plan of Greystokes Priory. Thus, the detective, instituted an immediate search and Clyde was discovered physically little the worse for his adventure; but his nervous system had received a severe shock. In after life he never recalled, without a shudder, those hours of nameless horror in the dungeon. He had forced himself to investigate the secret tunnel and had found the well to which Jessel had referred, and where he had flung the body of the unhappy Reggie, which was later recovered.

But if this ordeal had left its mark on Clyde, it would appear that Mrs. Brackenbury, judging by her behaviour, was even more severely affected by the tragic events. She became so violently hysterical that a doctor was hastily called to give her a sedative. He advised Sally that her employer must have a complete rest.

"Rest!" echoed Mrs. Brackenbury when Sally had conveyed this advice. "I shall never rest until I get away from this dreadful house of murder and sudden death. To think of that monster...of how I trusted him and believed him to be so friendly! He made a cat's paw of me when he invited me here...It was only to further his plans...to get more witnesses to show how devoted he seemed to be to Reggie...he fooled me. To think any man dare to fool me!"

Mrs. Brackenbury, beginning to show further signs of hysteria, Sally strove to calm her. To a casual observer, it might appear that Mrs. Brackenbury was attaching too much importance to her own dignity; but Sally's shrewd mind guessed the actual reason for such a violent display of anger. Mrs. Brackenbury had built up hopes of marrying Owen Jessel and reigning at Greystokes Priory. With the disappearance of Reggie a still more brilliant prospect had presented itself. If Reggie were dead—very very sad, of course, and terribly tragic—his uncle would become heir to the baronetcy. And all the time she was dwelling on the idea of becoming the wife of a baronet, Jessel had never at any time had any intention of marrying her. It was this thought that galled her and induced the outbursts of hysteria, rather than the tragedy that hung over the house.

Sally in a flurry of departure, and packing, felt immensely relieved that she was going to escape from the sinister atmosphere of Greystokes Priory. She had gone downstairs to ask Soames about the trains to London for the following morning, when she saw Purcell coming out of Jessel's study. He hurried up to her.

"Where have you been, Sally?" he asked. "I haven't caught even a glimpse of you for the last two days."

"Mrs. Brackenbury has been so upset about... about.....everything. I couldn't leave her. Now that we are returning to town as soon as possible, I have had so much packing to do."

"So you're going back to town? The American is also returning...I reckon he doesn't like the atmosphere of this place any more than you do."

Sally looked up, her eyes kindling. "He has quite recovered?"

"Seems all right now. But I think the job of amateur detective doesn't appeal to him any more."

"But for you, he might have died. I think you're wonderful the way you unravelled the mystery, and found Clyde before it was too late...the way, too you tracked down the real murderer, and always pretending you were going on another line. You're a marvellous detective."

Purcell grinned. "So you think I'm marvellous. I can only hope my chief at the Yard thinks the same. I suppose I ought to tell you that Clyde had a hand in it, too. Oddly enough, it was a chance remark of his that set my mind thinking in the right direction in this case."

"What was that?"

"He was talking about Jessel's obsession regarding his family. He remarked: 'I believe he wouldn't stop at murder to save the honour of the family'. He was right about that, wasn't he?"

Sally shivered. "It's all so horrible. If only you could have found out in time to save poor Reggie." Tears filled her eyes.

He laid his hand on her shoulder. "Don't let this prey on your mind, Sally. It might have a serious effect on a sensitive type like yourself."

"It isn't only that it preys on mind. It's Owen Jessel's strange mania that absorbs me. I should like to see that history of his family which he has been writing all these years."

"That doesn't interest me...its more Moncrieff's line...he's browsing over it now in Jessel's study. Getting 'copy' perhaps. If I'm not mistaken he's turned journalist again." He glanced at his watch. "I must get off...I'm going up to London. By the way, when you're back in town, if you feel like ringing me up, my phone number——"

"Is Whitehall 1212," she interposed, smiling.

"Smart girl. I was thinking of my private number."

"I remember that, too. Of course I'll ring you up."

"That's great. Good-bye, then for the present."

After he had gone, she stood for a few moments with a thoughtful expression on her face. Then, as if yielding to a sudden impulse, she turned and went in the direction of Jessel's study.

Clyde was studying an old leather bound book with the Jessel coat of arms embossed on the cover. He sprang to his feet as Sally entered.

"What luck. I've been dodging round trying all day to see you."

"You ought to have been resting." Anxiously she noted his drawn expression, the lines round his eyes and mouth. "You've been through a dreadful time."

"Forget it."

"But you run into such terrible experiences...your ordeal when you were stowaway on the "Montania" must have left its mark on you."

"You call it a terrible experience! It was the greatest thing that ever happened to me. It brought you into my life. Sally..." He took her hands and drew her towards him. "Dear heart, won't you stay in my life for always?"

"It looks as if I'll have to, darling," she said softly. "You seem to have such a mania for running into trouble, Clyde. You need me to look after you!"

